

Tenders floated for first stage of refugee camp project

Condolence register opens in Dominican Republic

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan's consul in the Dominican Republic, Bishara Issa, has opened a register at the consulate in the capital Santo Domingo for Arab citizens there to express their condolences over the passing away of King Hussein.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الراي

Volume 24 Number 7073

AMMAN WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1999, DHUL QADAH 1, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 Fils

Policemen refused amnesty in Biko case

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa's truth commission on Tuesday rejected amnesty for four former security policemen involved in the death of black consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977. The truth and reconciliation commission's amnesty committee said Harold Snyman, Daniel Siebert, Jacobus Bencke and Rubin Marx had "clearly conspired to conceal the truth of what led to the tragic death of Biko." A fifth officer, Gideon Niewoudt, 45, had his amnesty application refused in January.

Georgian police break up protest supporting priest

TBILISI (AP) — Police used batons and electric prods to break up an unsanctioned protest in Tbilisi on Tuesday by a controversial priest and about 200 of his supporters. The protesters were trying to march to the parliament after a court postponed its decision on the priest's appeal to win back his parish church. Georgia's Orthodox patriarchate stripped Father Vasily of his church post in 1995, accusing him of pursuing an anti-Christian policy through his efforts to introduce ecumenism. The police beat the demonstrators, who included father Vasily and other priests, and piled them into buses to be transported out of the city. From there they must return to Tbilisi on foot.

Cholera kills 42 in Zambian capital

LUSAKA (AFP) — Cholera has killed 42 people in the Zambian capital Lusaka over the past month, health officials said Tuesday. Local government officials have banned street vending of foodstuffs and alerted hotels and restaurants to the threat. "Forty-two people have died so far. We are putting in place preventive measures by banning open vending of foodstuffs and have hired companies to work on drainage," Council spokesman Daniel Musoka told reporters. Cholera has also been reported in other centres around the country, with 10 deaths recorded in the northern provincial capital of Ndola.

27 die in Indian bus accident

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Twenty-seven people were killed Tuesday when a speeding bus crashed into a ditch and overturned in the Indian state of West Bengal, officials said. Eighty others were injured in the accident in Hooghly district when the driver lost control of the bus, the Press Trust of India reported. "At least 53 of the injured are in a critical condition," the state's Home Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee said. Police and local villagers were still engaged in rescue work, he said.

28 dead in Cote d'Ivoire accident

ABIDJAN (AFP) — Twenty-eight people were killed and 42 were injured when a speeding bus overturned on a road in central Cote d'Ivoire, hospital sources said Tuesday. The accident occurred Monday near Bouake, some 300 kilometres north of Abidjan, apparently the result of a blown tyre. According to an initial investigation, the bus, with 72 passengers aboard, first struck a tree and then plunged into a ravine. The 42 injured, including 10 in a serious condition, were taken to hospital in Bouake.

Jordan plays down protests over transfer of Al Aqsa mufti's office

Israeli anger at 'normal' decision hasty — minister

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Jordan on Tuesday played down Israeli protests against a Palestinian National Authority decision to relocate the headquarters of Al Aqsa Mosque's mufti, but said that any Israeli move to allow Jews to pray inside the mosque will bear negative consequences. "What happened is a normal thing that does not deserve all this fuss. Jordan was aware of the step and we did not object," Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs Abdul Salam Abbad said. The minister was commenting on PNA-appointed Mufti Ekrima Sabri's decision to transfer his office, currently inside the compound that hosts Al Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem, to a nearby office in the same building. The mufti's decision angered Israeli officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday his government has appealed to the United States to stop the mufti from moving into the new office. Israeli security officials were quoted as describing Sabri's step as "provocative." "If Ararat's mufti moves in, then there is no reason why Israel should not allow Jews to pray at Al Aqsa Mosque," an Israeli security official, who was quoted by a Western newspaper, said. Israel rejects any PNA control in Jerusalem and claims the Holy City, which it seized in 1967, as its eternal capital. Jordan and the PNA share the administration of the Islamic Waqf (trust) in Jerusalem. Israel accepts Jordan's role but disapproves of the PNA's. Abbad said the Palestinian decision does not deserve any hasty reaction

from Israeli authorities, adding that the mosque is an Islamic site and no one is allowed to pray there except Muslims. "Sheikh Ekrima is the preacher of the mosque. He was conducting his work from an office there," Abbad said. "He decided to transfer to another office in the same building. We believe that there is no problem at all and we have not protested this move," Abbad told the Jordan Times. "The mosque is Islam's third holiest shrine and non-Muslims are forbidden from praying inside the mosque," the minister added. The chairman of the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilisation Research, Al al Bayt Foundation, Nasseriddine Assad, said any Israeli move to allow Jews to pray in Al Aqsa Mosque will draw the wrath of the Islamic World.

"These threats are not strange to the Jews," Assad, a former higher education minister, said. "They always abuse Muslim holy sites, and that is their history, and nothing can stop them but force. If such a situation occurs, it will anger Muslims not only in Palestine but in the whole Muslim World," he added. Jewish fundamentalists' attempts to pray in Al Aqsa Mosque caused a bloody confrontation between Palestinians and the Israeli army in 1992, in which 20 Muslim worshippers were shot and killed by Israeli soldiers inside the mosque. Jewish extremists claim that the mosque was built on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon, which was destroyed by Romans in the first century, and have repeatedly disclosed their plan to destroy Al Aqsa Mosque.

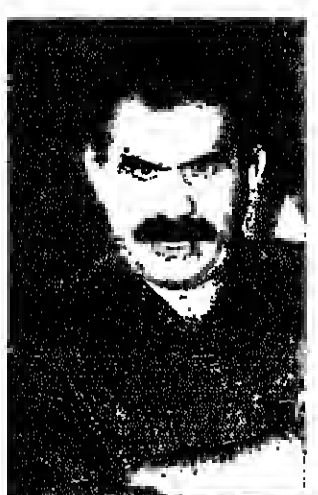


KING ABDULLAH VISITS ORPHANS: Following the footsteps of his late father King Hussein, His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday meets with children during a visit to the Dar Al Bir orphanage in Hummar. King Abdullah, accompanied by Her Royal Highness Princess Rania and Her Royal Highness Princess Zein, inspected the various sections of the orphanage, which is home to 230 orphans ranging from four months to 14 years in age. King Abdullah's visit to Dar Al Bir is the first since he assumed his constitutional duties on Feb. 7 following the death of King Hussein, who donated Hashemiyeh Palace as a home for the orphans. King Abdullah voiced his appreciation for the orphanage staff for their efforts to care for the orphans and provide decent living conditions for them (Petra photo)

Turkey announces capture of Ocalan

PKK leader taken in undercover operation in Kenya

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey announced Tuesday it had captured its enemy number one, rebel Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan, in an undercover operation and had hauled him back to face trial in a Turkish court. Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), was apparently abducted in Nairobi on Monday after leaving the Greek ambassador's residence en route to the city's airport, according to Greek officials. But the Kurdistan Information Centre in Bonn said Ocalan had been kidnapped Monday from the Greek embassy in Nairobi, where he had taken refuge since Feb. 2, and was then taken to Turkey. The development caused immediate diplomatic tensions, with Greece and Kenya trading accusations of recklessness, while Israel flatly denied reports that its Mossad secret service was involved in the operation. Protests by Kurds across Europe in show support of Ocalan turned violent as news



Abdullah Ocalan

of the abduction spread, with demonstrators seizing hostages inside several Greek diplomatic premises and at the Kenyan embassy in Bonn. But in Ankara, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit was jubilant in announcing the capture of Ocalan, wanted on charges of treason and terrorism in connection with his movement's 15-year-old violent campaign in southeast Turkey for an

independent Kurdistan. "As of 3:00 a.m. [0100 GMT] this morning, the head of the separatist terror organisation Abdullah Ocalan is in Turkey," Ecevit said. "He was arrested in an undercover operation. We had been following him for 12 days in various countries," he said. His voice choked with emotion, Ecevit added: "May God save our nation and all mankind from terrorism and war." The prime minister refused to give details of the operation, but stressed neither Ocalan nor anyone else had been injured. "He will now be made to answer for his deeds by the independent courts of Turkey," the prime minister declared. "We said that wherever he was hiding in the world, we would get him. This state has kept its word. It has kept its vows to the mothers of our martyrs," he said. More than 30,000 people have died in the fighting between Turkish forces and the PKK, according to the Turkish government.

Ecevit called on PKK members to give themselves up, telling them: "You have now reached the end of your road." "Everyone must know that nothing can be achieved in Turkey by terrorism," he added. Ocalan had been on the run since October, when he was flushed out of Syria under the threat of Turkish military action. He arrived in Rome in November and immediately requested political asylum, declaring that he renounced violence and was seeking a peaceful resolution to Kurdish demands for a homeland. Turkey demanded his extradition, sparking a diplomatic row with Italy and other European powers, which showed a reluctance to intervene and risk upheaval within their own large Kurdish and Turkish minorities. Ocalan left Italy in mid-January, beginning a prolonged search aboard a small private plane for a country of shelter. (Continued on page 2)

King receives condolences from Bangladeshi premier

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday received at Raghadan Palace Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who offered her country's condolences on the passing away of King Hussein. Sheikh Hasina also offered her condolences to HRH Crown Prince Hamzah at the Royal Court. The King and Prince Hamzah expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the Bangladeshi premier, who later visited the grave of the late King and recited verses of the Holy Quran and laid wreaths on his grave. Also Tuesday, King Abdullah received U.S. Congressman Sam Gejdenson, who offered his condolences on the death of King Hussein. The King voiced his appreciation for the visit of the congressman, who later met with Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khateib and House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali. King Abdullah received General Ali Ben Majed Al Omari, the minister in charge of the Omani armed forces, who offered his condolences.

Omari delivered a letter from Sultan Qaboos dealing with bilateral ties and issues of common concern to Jordan and Oman. King Abdullah also received Princess Sheikhha Fatma Bint Mubarak, wife of Sheikh Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahayan, president of the United Arab Emirates, and Sheikh Abdullah Beo Zayed Al Nahayan, UAE minister of information and culture, as well as Sheikhha Sabikah, wife of the crown prince of Bahrain. They offered their condolences to the King, Her Majesty Queen Noor and the members of the Royal family. King Abdullah received a cable from Pakistani President Mohammad Rafiq Tarar, who congratulated the King upon the assumption of his constitutional duties. Also yesterday, King Abdullah received cables of condolences on the passing away of King Hussein from the president of Malta and the prime minister of the Netherlands. Earlier, the Bangladeshi premier held a meeting with Prime Minister Fayez

Tarawneh to review issues of common concern to the two countries. Tarawneh said Jordan is keen on promoting cooperation with Bangladesh in various fields. Sheikh Hasina expressed her deep grief over the passing away of the late King and paid tribute to his great contributions to the Arab and Islamic nations. Later, in a statement to Jordan Television, Sheikh Hasina said the government and people of Bangladesh have deep respect for the late King, whom she said had dedicated his life to serving his nation and the cause of peace. Tarawneh said he and Sheikh Hasina discussed issues of common concern, including combating poverty, an issue in which Bangladesh has achieved major successes through providing soft loans for projects to needy people. He said Jordan can benefit from the Bangladeshi experience in providing loans to the needy and in governmental cooperation with charitable organisations to deal with poverty.

Kurdish protesters storm Greek embassies across Europe

LONDON (AFP) — Kurdish protesters stormed Greek embassies across Europe from London to Moscow on Tuesday in a massive and sometimes violent show of support for outlawed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan. The coordinated protests erupted even before the government in Ankara announced that Ocalan had been snatched in an undercover operation and was in Turkey where he would face trial for terrorism, a capital offence in that country. In London, Vienna, The Hague and elsewhere protesters seized hostages inside Greek diplomatic buildings, while in Bonn two hostages were held inside the Kenyan embassy. In Paris, police ended an occupation in the Kenyan embassy, arresting 16 Kurds after negotiations failed with occupiers who had threatened to set fire to themselves and sever embassy staff held hostage. Police also cleared out 15 Kurds from the Greek

embassy in the capital. In Bern, Kurds assumed to be PKK members continued their occupation of the Greek embassy, calling for Ocalan to be returned to western Europe and vowing to "fight until the last drop of blood" for their leader. In The Hague, mounted police and police with dogs charged a demonstration and arrested 50 as they headed for the Greek ambassador's residence where protesters held the ambassador's wife, his eight-year-old son and a Filipino worker. Elsewhere, Kurdish protesters armed with petrol threatened to set themselves alight. A young Kurdish woman was seriously injured after she set herself on fire in Copenhagen and in Germany two Kurdish women also set themselves on fire, suffering serious burns. In Stockholm about 30 Kurdish protesters, who were occupying the Greek consulate, left the building peacefully in late afternoon and were taken to a police

station for questioning, police said. The Kurds could face forced entry charges, police said. In Vienna, Kurdish protesters were still holding seven people hostage in the Greek embassy including the ambassador and his wife, vowing to remain there until their demands are met, officials said. The ambassador, who refused to consent to police storming the building, told Greek television by telephone that the situation could "last several days." Two staff were held hostage in the Kenyan embassy in Bonn. The Kurds targeted the Kenyan embassy after Greece admitted Tuesday it had sheltered Ocalan at its ambassador's residence in Nairobi until he was snatched after leaving for the airport. A Greek caretaker was held hostage inside the Greek embassy in London, where some 20 Kurds occupied the building and around 300 others staged a protest outside. Negotiators and the Greek

ambassador were trying to persuade the demonstrators to leave peacefully. French police earlier stormed the Greek consulate in Strasbourg, eastern France, to dislodge about 30 Kurds. Around 100 Kurds also gathered outside the Council of Europe building in Strasbourg, while in the southern French port of Marseilles 50 Kurds left the Greek consulate building peacefully. In Moscow, special interior ministry forces surrounded the Greek embassy after around 60 Kurds stormed the building. The protesters quit the building around two hours later. In Geneva, 25 Kurdish militants, armed with iron bars, forced their way into the United Nations building overnight, using the arrival of a delivery lorry to storm the gates. Police said the Kurds had demanded the U.N. pledge to guarantee Ocalan's safety. Around 150 Kurds staged a protest outside the Greece embassy in Beirut.



Kurdish protesters Tuesday occupy the residence of the Greek ambassador to the Netherlands in the Hague in protest against the detention of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. Three people, including the wife and child of the Greek ambassador, were being held by the protesters (AP photo)

Associations, parties to proceed with delayed 'national conference'

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — The professional associations and the opposition parties ended more than six months of strife with a meeting late yesterday and decided to finally proceed with the much talked-about National Conference for Reform and Salvation.

At the meeting, held at the headquarters of the Islamic Action Front, four union leaders representing the Council of Presidents of Jordan's 13 professional associations presented to the parties extensive studies detailing strategies and policies in a variety of fields ranging from the economy and democratic reforms to normalization of ties with Israel and relations with other Arab states.

Around 150 representatives from parties and syndicates, youth and student clubs, as well as other civil society institutions, launched the National Conference last June.

A "National Salvation Plan" to counter government policies and calling for a halt to privatization and economic liberalization, more public freedoms, as well as a 180-degree turn in the country's traditional pro-Western policies, was expected to be issued by September.

But differences soon emerged, first with fierce protests by many independent politicians that the modus operandi of the conference was undemocratic and that the "salvation plan" was being imposed by the organizers on the whole conference.

The ambitious project risked total collapse on Aug. 2, when the professional associations — supposedly accounting for 60 per cent of the conference's participants — unilaterally declared an eight-month postponement of the conference.

Association leaders argued that such a wide-ranging platform needed to outline implementation strategies and not

only issue political slogans in order to be effective. Hence, the associations said an eight-month preparation period was required.

Yesterday's meeting was not the first time that parties and associations sat at the same table since the postponement decision, a union leader pointed out, but the associations' detailed studies on strategies to pursue the "salvation master plan" were finally officially presented.

"The parties said they will study the papers we presented, and we will meet again in three weeks," said Hosni Abu Ghaida, president of the 35,000-member Jordan Engineers Association.

The next step in the already troubled life of the yet unborn National Conference will be the draft of a joint paper including both the associations' and parties' views.

Jordan opens its borders to Palestinian newspapers, TV

AMMAN (AP) — Jordan has agreed to allow Palestinian newspapers and magazines to go on sale in the Kingdom for the first time since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the director general of the Press and Publications Department said Tuesday.

Jordan will also broadcast a 30 to 60-minute programme produced by the Palestine Television Corp. once a month, Iyad Qattan told the Associated Press.

Qattan said it would take two to three days for the Palestinian publications to appear on the country's newsstands as arrangements needed to be concluded with local distributors.

He had instructed all airports and border crossings to grant access to the papers, he

said.

More than half of Jordan's 4.2 million people are said to be of Palestinian origin.

Newspapers from Arab East Jerusalem and the West Bank can thus expect to find a substantial market in the Kingdom.

Among the best-known Palestinian titles are the dailies Al-Quds Al-Ayam, al-Shaab, all published in Arab East Jerusalem, and the weekly magazine, Al-Mahd, which is published in Bethlehem.

After the 1967 war, the government said Israel's occupation of east Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank prevented the publications' distribution in Jordan.

The first television broad-

cast will occur toward the end of February, Qattan said. Palestine Television is based in Gaza City.

Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority have agreed to conduct market surveys of viewers in each other's territories, he said.

Qattan said the Palestinian papers would have to respect the Press and Publications Law.

The law has come under heavy fire by journalists and human rights organisations in Jordan and abroad as being restrictive. The government of Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said after its enactment on Sept. 1, 1998 that it was encouraging a soft application of the law.



Pro-Iranian Hizbollah militants display a SAGGER anti-tank wire guided missile in the Iqlim at-Touffah region near the self-declared Israeli security zone in south Lebanon. The group took Western and Arab journalists in a tour to their front positions in south Lebanon from where they launch attacks against Israeli troops and their allies South Lebanon Army (SLA) militiamen. The SAGGER can engage targets at ranges of 500 to 3,000 metres and penetrates over 400mm of armour (AFP photo)

'Iraq must be consulted over U.N. proposals'

DUBAI (AFP) — Iraq must be consulted first if any U.N. Security Council initiative is to stand a chance of renewing cooperation with Baghdad, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf insisted on Tuesday.

"Any question on which it fails to consult us in advance... will have no chance of suc-

cess," Sahhaf said in an interview with the Emirati newspaper Al Khaleej.

"If they refuse a dialogue with us, they will not be authorised to come to us and we will not be concerned with whatever they are planning," he said.

The Security Council is of course a sovereign body, but it does not have the right to turn

into a dictator, neither under the U.N. charter nor international law," the foreign minister said.

In January, Iraq already rejected a U.N. initiative to set up three panels to review ties with Baghdad in the wake of the Desert Fox air war waged by the United States and Britain the previous month.

Turkey announces capture of Ocalan

(Continued from page 1)

Syria had earlier expelled him under pressure from Ankara, leading him to Russia first.

Sightings of him were reported in a number of countries, but he was denied refuge everywhere in Europe.

Greece, which has strained relations with Turkey, on Tuesday admitted it gave him shelter — "for humanitarian reasons" — for 12 days at its ambassador's residence in Kenya.

Ocalan, however, left the premises on Monday with the intention of going to the Netherlands, but vanished while en route to Nairobi airport.

Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos said in

Athens, Kenyan Foreign Minister Bonaya Godana said he had confronted the Greek ambassador after learning that Ocalan was in Nairobi and demanded that the Kurdish leader leave.

"The government immediately requested for his repatriation from the country to which the Greek ambassador agreed after consultations with his minister in Athens," Godana said in Nairobi, adding that Athens knew Ocalan's destination.

Across Europe, the PKK showed its muscle among the large Kurdish diaspora, staging protests that it said would only be called off once Turkey had guaranteed Ocalan's security.

The demonstrators held hostages inside Greek diplomatic buildings in London, Vienna and the Hague, while in Bonn, two hostages were held inside the Kenyan embassy. Kurdish women in Copenhagen, Berlin and London suffered serious injuries after setting themselves on fire.

The United States, which had maintained that Ocalan should face trial, welcomed the arrest and called on Kurdish militants to end their protest action.

Turkey stepped up security at its embassies in 21 countries and asked governments for assistance to prevent attacks on Turkish citizens.

Ocalan potentially faces the death penalty on conviction, although Turkey says it has not carried out an execution since 1984.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tarawneh meets with WB official

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh on Tuesday met with visiting World Bank Middle East Department Director Inder Sud, who conveyed his staff's heartfelt condolences over the passing of King Hussein. Sud wished Jordan continued progress and prosperity under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah and expressed hope that King Abdullah will follow the path that his late father charmed, adding that it has won Jordan respect, appreciation and credibility on an international scale. The World Bank official lauded the investment climate in Jordan, noting in particular Jordan's achievements in the educational, health and environmental sectors. Sud renewed the international financial institutions' support for Jordan to encourage economic growth in the Kingdom.

Prince Ali receives Circassian delegation

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Prince Ali Ben Al Hussein Tuesday received at the Royal Court a delegation representing the Circassians in Turkey, who arrived here to convey their condolences over the passing of King Hussein. Prince Ali thanked the delegation for their kind gesture and wished them continued good health and prosperity.

Royal Decrees endorse appointments

AMMAN (Petra) — Three Royal Decrees issued Tuesday endorsed the Judicial Council's appointments and transfers of judges at various courts as well as at the Ministry of Justice. Hani Salim Rafati was appointed as a judge at the Court of Appeals, in charge of income tax cases. Mohammad Fahmi Omari, as a judge at the Justice Ministry. Judge Khalifa Suleiman was transferred to the Irbid Court of Appeals. Judge Aref Taher to the Customs Appeals Court. Judge Mamoun Ghalayini to the Customs Court of First Instance. Judge Mohammad Abdul Qader to Ain Al Basha Magistrate Court. Adnan Mubaiddeen to Karak Municipal Court. Judge Hassan Hazimeh to Sahab Magistrate Court. Judge Ahmad Bahadieh to Shobak Magistrate Court. Judge Mohammad Siksit to Ay Magistrate Court in Karak Governorate. Judge Izzat Khatibeh to Bani Kananah. Judge Falaah Hussein El Tayem to the Customs Court of First Instance and Judge Firas Jarrah to Irbid Magistrate Court.

Cabinet endorses diplomatic postings

AMMAN (Petra) — The Cabinet Tuesday endorsed a list of appointees as diplomatic attachés at the Foreign Ministry. The list includes Haroun Hassan, Ihab Omeish, Maan Khreisat, Asael Al Tal, Fawaz Bilbetsi, Nader Tarawneh, Mohammad Shabbat, Mu'az Hiyasat, Sinan Al Majali, Isam Bdour, Sami Ghosheh, Sabab Rafi'ee, Hamzah Shraideh, Amjad Mubaiddeen, Tharwat Nu'eima and Mohammad Salah Hamid.

Instituto Cervantes suspends cultural activities

AMMAN (J.T.) — In observance of the period of mourning over the passing of His Majesty King Hussein, Instituto Cervantes, Spanish Cultural Centre in Amman, has announced the suspension of all its cultural activities until May.

Rain expected today

AMMAN (Petra) — Fair weather conditions are expected to continue today, with a drop in temperatures and rainfall at night, the Meteorology Department said Tuesday. Rainfall is to start late tonight in the northern parts of the Kingdom and spread gradually over the country with southwesterly and moderate winds.

France, Qatar hold war games in Gulf

DOHA (AFP) — French and Qatari troops on Tuesday wound up several days of live-fire joint exercises in this Arab Gulf state, the official news agency QNA said. Qatari infantry and combat helicopters took part in the exercises, which aimed "to boost the fighting capacity" of the emirate's army, it said. The two states have been linked by a defence pact since 1994 and hold regular joint land, sea and air exercises. France supplies 80 per cent of the weapons used by the 10,000-strong Qatari armed forces.

Bajammal in S. Arabia for border talks

RIYADH (AP) — Yemen's foreign minister, Abdul Kader Bajammal, arrived here Tuesday to pursue a solution to the two countries' border dispute. Yemeni diplomats said, Bajammal's meetings will include technical discussions related to border demarcation, the diplomats in Riyadh said. They spoke on condition of anonymity.

Two political activists detained

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — The prosecutor general has ordered two political activists detained for "illegal political activities," a senior interior ministry official said Tuesday.

The official, who asked not to be named, said that Talal Abu Riyaleh was detained on Monday at the Iraqi border on his way back home from Baghdad, while Nayef Mahmoud Judah was arrested for distributing "anti-regime" leaflets on Feb. 7, the day His Majesty King Hussein passed away.

"Talal was detained following information that he is being involved in illegal activities,"

the official told the Jordan Times.

"If interrogation implicates him, he will be referred to the court for trial, if not, he will be released," he added.

The official declined to give further details about the nature of these activities but said Abu Riyaleh, a close associate of the leading opposition figure Laith Shbeilat, is a member of the powerful Jordan Engineers Association (JEA) and is known for his frequent visit to the Iraqi capital.

The wife of Abu Riyaleh said her husband was arrested at the borders and she was informed by the driver who brought him that he was detained by security forces

"without giving any specific reason."

"Until now we do not know his whereabouts and we have informed the JEA to inquire about him," the wife said.

The official said Judah, a member of the illegal Tahreeq Party (Islamic liberation), will also be referred to the court for trial "soon."

Al Tahreeq, which was established in the early fifties, is the only illegal party in Jordan.

Last year, more than 24 party activists, including their leader Ata Abu Rishah, were tried before the State Security Court on "lese majeste" charges.

A statement by the JEA said it will urge the authorities to release its two members.

PRAYER TIMES

04:55Fajr
06:13Sunrise/Duha
11:50Dhuhr
14:58Asr
17:26Maghreb
18:44Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swefieh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Torra Sancta Church Tel.
4623366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4646138
Church of Presentation, Swe-
fieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church
Tel. 4624757
The English-Language
Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the
Department of Meteorology

Warm weather conditions will
prevail during the day becoming
cool at night. Skies will be
partly cloudy with a chance of
scattered showers and winds
southwesterly moderate to
active. In Aqaba, it will be
moderate to warm, cloudy,
winds northerly moderate
becoming southerly moderate
to active in the afternoon, and
seas rough.

Amman06/17
Aqaba10/22
Deserts04/19
Jordan Valley10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 19, Aqaba 22
Humidity readings: Amman
47 per cent, Aqaba 44 per
cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

Dr. Afif Shukri4898863
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh482195
Dr. Sa'ad Tarfawi4788285
Dr. Hanna Mansour 4750197

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy5537004
Raka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Amin Abo Ideh (02)244468
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Ratib Atallah(05)994424
Palestine Pharmacy(05)983562

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Sple-

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Res-
cue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank4775121
Highway Police5343402
Traffic police4896390
Public Security Dept.4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 489467
Amman Municipality Com-
plaints4787111
Telephone Information (directo-
ry assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs
.....4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Sple-

cial Surgery5921199
The Islamic Abdl5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre5856856
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4642816
Akileh Maternity4642412
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5334444
Al-Muasher Hospital 56672279
Al-Ahli, Abdali56641646
Italian, Al-Muashreen 47771013
Al-Bashir477511126
Army, Marka489161115
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Amal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital
(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital
(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital(09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital
(09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital
(02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital
(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafces Hospital

(02)7101372, (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital
(02)7102831, (02)7102011
Speciality Hospital(02)7103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by
Royal Jordanian (RJ) information
departments at the Queen Alia
International Airport Tel.
44153200-5, where it should
always be verified. Information on
other flights can be supplied on
phone 44 (53700). Information on
Royal Wings flights can be sup-
plied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ)
Flights
07:30Damascus (RJ)
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:55Larnaca (RJ)

DEPARTURES

06:50Larnaca (RJ)
08:25Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
10:20Rome (RJ)
11:30Istanbul (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
19:45Colombo (RJ)
20:00 Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:10Beirut (RJ)
20:15Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:15Bombay (RJ)
20:35New Delhi (RJ)
21:00Calcutta, Bangkok (RJ)
21:15Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
22:45Sanaa (RJ)
23:00Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights

06:30Larnaca (CY)
07:25Damascus, London (BA)
07:25Paris (AF)
10:30Cairo (MS)
12:00Medina, Jeddah (SV)
13:20Kuwait (KU)
14:10Bahrain (GF)
14:10Tunis (TU)
15:30Vienna (OS)
15:30Rome (AZ)
16:30Sharjah (AH)
19:30 Abu Dhabi, Karachi (PK)
00:35Amsterdam (KL)
02:45Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA)
(RW)
09:35 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
17:45 Haifa (arriving at QAIA)
(RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at
QAIA) (RW)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
15:15 Haifa (from Marka Airport)
(RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
20:30Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)



Queen Noor receives Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Bab Al Salam, yesterday (Petra photo)

Queen receives Bangladeshi PM, wives of UAE emir and Bahraini crown prince

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor Tuesday received the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina at Bab Al Salam, a Royal Court statement said.

The prime minister said that Bangladesh observed three days of mourning for the death of His Majesty King Hussein because he was a "great person and good leader."

Queen Noor said that King Hussein, as a "devout Muslim," always devoted special attention to Islam in the world today.

The Queen added that His Majesty King Abdullah and the entire family are dedicated to keeping the "spirit of His Majesty King Hussein alive at every level."

The prime minister briefed the Queen on micro-credit projects for women in Bangladesh and extended an invitation to Queen Noor to visit her country and the projects.

Queen Noor said the Grumee Bank in Bangladesh is a "shining example" and pioneer of micro-enterprise for women and that women, particularly in Jordan, have played a pivotal role in "providing a safety net for all generations."

Attending the meeting were Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Abdul Samad Azad, Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism Mosharraf Hussein, the ambassador of Bangladesh and members of the accompanying delegation.

Earlier, Queen Noor received at Zahran Palace Her Highness Sheikhha Faima Bint Mubarak, the wife of Emir Sheikh Zayed of the United Arab Emirates, his daughter Her Highness Sheikhha Shama Bint Zaid, and wife of the Crown Prince of Bahrain Her Highness Princess Sabieika as well as members of the accompanying delegations from the UAE and Bahrain.

Attending with the Queen were Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rania Abdullah, Princess Basma Bint Talal, Princess Taghreed Mohammad, King Hussein's daughters: Princess Alia, Princess Aisha, Princess Zein and Princess Raiyah, as well as Princess Alia Al Faisal and Farah Daghestani.

Queen Noor also received numerous letters of condolences from heads of state and officials including the President of Colombia Andres Pastrana Arango, Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus of the Netherlands, Queen Margrethe of Denmark, King Harald and Queen Sonja of Norway, the King and Queen of Nepal, Prince and Princess Takamado of Japan, King Michael and Queen Anne of Romania, Prince Rainier of Monaco, Prince Mohammad of Morocco, President of Iceland Olafur Grinnson, Prince Philippe of Belgium, Kurt Waldheim, President of Austria Thomas Klestil and Prince Bernard of the Netherlands.

JPA slams decision to suspend weekly

'We were always worried that our democratic march would be hurt by... the harsh implementation of illogical articles in this [Press and Publications] Law' — JPA

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association (JPA) Tuesday slammed a recent court decision to suspend the publication of a weekly while its editor stands trial on charges of publishing false and insulting stories.

JPA urged the government to introduce changes to the much-opposed 1998 Press and Publications Law to eliminate such articles that allow for closures of newspapers during an ongoing trial.

Fahed Rimawi, the editor of Al Majd weekly, is charged with "slandering the Royal family, publishing false information about the prime minister and members of the government and attacks on the security service."

"We were always worried that our democratic march would be hurt by negative reactions to and the harsh implementation of illogical articles in this law," the JPA said in a statement issued after a board meeting.

"What we feared and did not want to happen has now taken place," it said. "And even though we remain fully confident in the justice of the Jordanian legal system, such a harsh law and such extreme articles certainly do not serve the interests of Jordan and its international stature," added the association.

Rimawi was detained on Feb. 4 and released on bail on Feb. 6. The paper said it had been banned from publishing until the trial is over, but no date for the proceedings has yet been set.

The Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontières, an independent organisation for the defence of press freedoms worldwide, protested at the suspension of the newspaper under the provisions of the new press law ratified on Sept. 1, 1998.

Reporters Sans Frontières urged Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh in a letter to use his influence to allow the weekly to resume publication.

According to Rimawi the paper could be closed for as long as one year until the case ends.

"Al Majd was only exercising its right to freedom of speech, as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been ratified by Jordan," said the organisation in the letter.

Temporary shut-off of water from Israel 'routine'

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The government Tuesday denied news reports that Israel will stop pumping water to Jordan to fend off a drought in the Jewish state, saying that the Kingdom requested a temporary shut off to guarantee its own supplies.

"The 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty is clear, and it has nothing to do with a drought in Israel," Jordan Valley Authority Secretary General Dureid Mahasneh told the Jordan Times.

Mahasneh's deputy Thafer Alem yesterday told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that the authority had asked Israel to stop pumping water from the Yarmouk River and Lake Tiberias to Jordan as of the end of January until the beginning of March in order to save supplies for this summer.

Alem said the "routine shut-off" is usually conducted during this time of the year to save water.

He added that the Kingdom obtains water from the two sources according to a seasonal programme, which can be changed in line with the country's water needs.

Several months ago, Israel assured Jordan that it is committed to the peace treaty, refuting recent statements by its Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan that it should reconsider the water agreement signed with the Kingdom.

"Israel will stand by all its commitments in the peace accord with Jordan and shall continue cooperation with the Kingdom on various issues, including water, as outlined in the agreement between the two countries," Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said then in an official clarification after Jordan protested Eitan's statement "If a need arises to examine the outcome of water shortages that our area might face, Israel shall do it together in consultation and cooperation with Jordan."

According to Annex II of the peace treaty Israel extracts 12 million cubic metres of water in summer — May 15 to Oct. 15 of each year — and Jordan extracts the rest of the Yarmouk's flow.

In winter — Oct. 16 to May 14 — Israel pumps out 13 mcm, and Jordan concedes to Israel pumping an additional 20 mcm from the river.

Last year, the two countries began construction of a JD1.65 million diversion dam to more effectively utilise 40 million cubic metres of the Yarmouk's overflow per year and regulate year-round inflow of water to the 110-kilometre-long King Abdullah Canal.

In return for the additional water that Jordan grants to Israel in winter, Israel agrees to transfer 20 mcm to the Kingdom from the Jordan River directly upstream from Deganya gauges on the river in summer.

Also in accordance with the treaty, the Kingdom is currently storing winter water in Lake Tiberias which it reclaims in the summer, supplying 60-80 mcm.

For the purpose of the implementation of this annex, the two sides have established a joint water committee comprised of three members from each country.

First women's shelter to open within few months

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Jordan will open its first women's shelter within the next few months to look after women who are subjected to domestic violence and whose lives are threatened by their families for "reasons of honour," Minister of Social Development Mohammad Kheir Mansour said Tuesday.

"The ministry has rented a building in Shmeisani, and is working on supporting it with the necessary equipment and staff to run it," the minister told the Jordan Times.

More than 60 women are forced to spend indefinite terms in the country's correctional facilities under what is termed as "administrative detention or protective custody," according to prison records. Many women are kept in prison without any charges.

Human rights activists have continuously called on the government to guarantee the security and freedom of these women, as many are locked in prison indefinitely, while others face the risk of being killed once they are released from prison.

Between 25 to 30 women are killed annually by their family members in Jordan for honour reasons, according to police statistics.

Although many sociologists and human rights activists believe a shelter is not a final solution, especially for women who are under threat by their families, Director of the Social Defence Department at the Ministry of Social Development Musa Safi, who will be in charge of the shelter, says the aim is "to separate women who are in prison for protective custody from the rest of the inmates."

"The shelter aims at providing safety, housing, rehabilitation and legal, social and psychological help for abused women and ones who are threatened by their families," Safi said, adding that "their cases are considered a social problem and it differs from that of the rest of women who are in correctional facilities."

The building will be able to house between 40 to 50 women over the age of 18 when it is fully furnished and equipped, he added.

He said the ministry is cooperating with the Family Protection Unit, affiliated with the Public Security Department, and recently opened an office to enable social service experts working at the unit to give support to the victims and their families.

"We will accept the women based on the recommendation of the social workers at the unit or by court or administrative orders," he explained.

The Family Protection Unit, which opened in September 1997, deals monthly with cases of sexual offences against women and minors as well as child abuse.

He added that the ministry has contacted several government and non-governmental organisations in order to form a committee headed by Mansour to draft the shelter's by-laws and technical procedures and to work on fund raising in order to expand the shelter into a national service.

The organisations expected to participate in the committee include representatives from the ministries of Social development, health and labour as well as representatives from the Public Security Department, the Jordanian National Commission for Women, the General Federation for Jordanian Women, the Jordanian Women's Union, the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

"This is a small project, but we are hoping that it will become a national project with the help and support of all," he concluded.

Health news

Government to build diabetes treatment centre

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan University Hospital on Tuesday awarded a JD2 million contract to two local firms to build a national centre for the treatment of diabetes and hereditary diseases.

Nearly 25 per cent of the Jordanian population above the age of 25 suffers from diabetes, according to Minister of Health Nael Ajlouni who signed the contract with the general managers of Hussein Miquddi and Partners and Khaled Maraga Establishment.

Ajlouni said the two-stage project is to start early next month and will be completed in 540 days.

Stage 1 will cost JD 1.38 million and entails the construction of part of the premises (basement, ground, first and second floors, utilities hall, specialists clinics, laboratories, X-ray unit and a multi-purpose meeting hall) on 6,500-square-metres of land, the minister said.

He said the JD350,000 second phase entails the installation of the electromechanical work.

Donations from various private sector institutions, charitable societies, the University of Jordan, the Higher Council for Science and Technology and private individuals will help pay for the construction.

The non-profit centre will be governed by a board of trustees representing the Ministry of Health, the Royal Medical Services of the Jordan Armed Forces, the Jordanian Diabetes Society, the University of Jordan and the private sector, the minister said.

He said the centre will also serve as an umbrella for the different sectors that offer services to diabetic patients and will conduct

'Jordan conforms to WHO minimum recommended rat percentages'

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — The Rodents and Insects Control Department claims it has full control over rats that could cause inconvenience to over two million citizens living in and around the capital, said an Amman Municipality official.

Following complaints in the Zarqa Municipality that rats had become a widespread problem, Department Director Bakir Abbadi said his institute was extending equal services to affluent and low-income areas under its jurisdiction, covering an area of 520 square kilometres.

According to the most recent survey conducted by the department as part of an ongoing process, only two out of each 100 areas where rat infestation is suspected have been found to contain rats.

"The results should alleviate the concern of many, especially as they conform with the World Health Organisation's minimum recommended rat percentages," Abbadi told the Jordan Times.

"Jordan is among the cleanest countries in the region, and we pride ourselves in being ranked as an advanced state by the WHO in rodent control."

The department, established in 1980, carries out regular surveys throughout the year in all areas that could attract rodents and insects.

Areas most attractive to rats and insects are ponds, garbage dumps, sewage drains and other areas where unsanitary conditions are known to prevail.

The department boasts of taking immediate action once it receives a complaint from any citizen who finds a rodent in the house, or suspects their presence inside or outside his or her residence.

"Within hours, our teams head to the given address," Abbadi said. "And our follow-up services continue until the place is proven clean."

Abbadi said the department functions as the main umbrella for 20 offices scattered across its areas of operation in the Greater Amman Municipality.

"These offices provide us with information about potential locations and our highly-trained staff meet the demands," he said.

During summer, or what Abbadi refers to as the "season of abundance" because the population of rats and other insects swells dramatically, "our teams work until mid-night."

Abbadi said the department still uses conventional methods to fight rodents and other insects such as spraying destructive annihilates and laying traps which rely on anticoagulants mixed with food items, causing death within 24 to 48 hours after consumption.

However, Abbadi declined to say how much money is spent annually to control rodents and insects.

Head of the Rodents Department Alla Rahableh said his office is focusing on a new strategy to fight rats and insects through spreading popular awareness on ways to fight such animals while preserving the environment.

"Destructive annihilates cause great air pollution and we are very keen to preserve the environment, not harm it," he said. "Our strategy now aims to acquaint the public with means of eliminating dirty places that are considered fertile living areas for rats. Once this step is in full force, we will be able to eradicate the issue."

Rats are vermin that reproduce at a very high rate. In normal conditions, a female rat conceives six times a year with eight to 12 babies each time. They become sexually mature at the age of only one and a half months.

These mammals, are also high food-consumers. A rat consumes one-tenth of its own weight each meal, which explains the large bait used to exterminate them.

Rats, disliked by most for their appearance, are often feared as they cause bacterial, viral and other fatal diseases to mankind, although, according to Abbadi, none of these diseases have been reported in the Kingdom.

Palliative care holistic approach to alleviate suffering

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — Over 200 terminally ill patients have received palliative care from Al-Malah Foundation For Humanistic Care, Jordan's sole organisation operating in this field.

The non-governmental society, run by a staff of eight and some 20 volunteers, offers physical, psychological and spiritual care to ease the suffering of patients and their families at a point where cure is no longer an option.

The six-year old society, whose name in Arabic means refuge, said its free services are offered around-the-clock to whoever knocks at its doors in Amman, its only area of operation.

"We care for the soul and the body," said Rana Hamad, director of the foundation. "Palliative care provides that kind of human to human treatment, which tries to alleviate the complex mixture of physical and the resulting spiritual pain of a dying patient," she explained during a recent interview with the Jordan Times.

"It neither precipitates or prolongs death but responds to the patient's last earthly needs and wishes in an attempt to make his remaining life as comfortable, pain-free and satisfactory as possible."

She stressed that palliative care views family as a vital part of the care unit. Hence, Al-Malah services extend to caregivers who need a great deal of support in dealing with and accepting the idea of a dying relative.

"A follow-up service continues in and after bereavement up to one year in some cases," said Hamad, who holds a post graduate degree in nursing.

Palliative care had its roots in the hospice movement which emerged in response to the abstract scientific approach versus the curative and care model it called for, doctors said.

Established in 1993 to treat the progressive number of the incurable cancer cases, Jordan was the first to introduce the palliative approach in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Statistics supplied by the Jordan Cancer Registry in 1996 put the rate of all cancer patients among Jordanians at 74.3 cases per 100,000 people compared to a 300 per 100,000 ratio in the United States.

According to the National Cancer Control Committee, a cancer patient does not only experience physical pain.

"Other psycho-related factors seem to contribute to increase suffering. These include depression, anxiety, anger, fear, restlessness, helplessness and desperation," it said.

Hamad stressed the importance of the mind-body relationship among terminally ill patients.

"The patient's psychological situation is highly reflected in his health situation. That is why our team studies and provides holistic aid to the patient taking all these factors into consideration," she said.

Nurses, physicians, social workers and the director each look at a certain aspect of the patient caring to his field of specialisation. A full plan is then set by all parties to provide the right kind of care.

Al Malah prefers a home-bound setting for patients as the core of its philosophy focuses on the quality, not the quantity of the patient's last days.

"It transfers hospital to home, not the other way round. And apart from offering sedatives, anti-fungals, opioids, and any other necessary pain control drug, the centre also provides hospital beds, alternating pressure pads and other services," Hamad said.

Entertainment activities, including birthdays, trips and social gatherings, could also be a key part in keeping the patient's morale quite high, Hamad said.

"Such functions are seen as helpful means in making the patient feel an active, beloved person and enjoying life to the full," she stressed.

Hamad said the society had plans to expand its services to other areas in Jordan. However, due to a financial crunch, the centre might ask new patients to shoulder some of the expenses of their successors.

Announcement

Imperial Travel & Tourism Co.

announces its appointment as the general sales agents for

in Jordan as of February 16, 1999.

At the following address:

Shmeisani, Abdul Hamid Shouman Str.
Fanous Centre Bldg. 1st floor
Tel.: 5664871/2/3
Fax : 5664870

Russians ease their opposition to security annex of peace plan

RAMBOUILLET, France (AP) — With four days left to cut a deal at the Kosovo peace talks, Serb negotiators appear to have backed down on most of their demands except forbidding NATO troops on Yugoslav territory, but they seem to have lost Russian support on the issue.

Russia, which has backed Serbia in its opposition to foreign troops, now has apparently turned its back on Belgrade. While Moscow may not approve a NATO force, it at least will not block it, diplomatic sources said Tuesday.

Under heavy pressure from the United States and five European nations to sign an American-sponsored political settlement by noon Saturday, Serb President Milan Milutinovic said Monday he is willing to give Kosovo's ethnic Albanians wide-ranging self-rule.

However, he said he can't compromise on NATO occupation to help enforce any agreement.

"We don't think that the troops are needed if the agreement is good and acceptable to the majority of people living in Kosovo," Milutinovic said, adding that abandoning NATO demands for a peacekeeping force was a "precondition" for any eventual peace settlement.

A diplomatic source, speaking Tuesday on condition of anonymity, said reports from the weekend meeting of the Contact Group — the United States, Russia, France, Britain, Germany and Italy — "were encouraging. The Russians will not block the military annex" to the Kosovo peace plan.

This means President Slobodan Milosevic will have no choice but to back down or risk NATO air strikes.

The Contact Group is pushing Serbia-led Yugoslavia to grant autonomy to the ethnic Albanian majority of Kosovo. More than 2,000 people have been killed in fighting in the southern Yugoslav province over the past year.

The Americans say any Kosovo settlement must be guaranteed by a NATO force. The alliance is completing plans to dispatch as many as 30,000 troops to Kosovo, including up to 4,000 Americans.

Russia, another one of the outside countries overseeing the talks, is pushing just as hard for a resolution by Saturday. But Moscow opposes NATO air strikes.

Milutinovic said the Serbians wouldn't be surprised if the Russians change their minds regarding NATO, under Western pressure. Apparently, according to the diplomatic source, they have done so.

"We can't rule out such a possibility," Milutinovic said.

The Kosovo Albanians seem ready to sign a three-year interim agreement and tone down their demands for independence, but they want a NATO presence to protect them from any threat by Yugoslav forces.

A Kosovo Albanian close to the talks in the 14th century French chateau here said U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright laid out three possibilities for the Albanians: — Kosovo Albanians don't sign and they lose all American support. The United States

shuts down Kosovo's borders with Albania and Macedonia, closes all roads and cuts off supplies to the rebels.

— The Kosovo Albanians sign and the Serbs don't. The United States gives strong support to Kosovo's Albanians and bombs the Serbs.

— Everybody signs. NATO enters Kosovo and enforces the agreement.

NATO has threatened air strikes against Yugoslavia if they don't reach an agreement here. The Serbs seem to have been backed into a corner, and have two options: bad and worse.

First, they could sign the deal and face a public backlash for giving away Kosovo, which is considered the cradle of Serbia. Second, they could not sign the deal and prepare for NATO to unleash its missiles and bombs on Yugoslavia.

For the first time since the Kosovo conference started Feb. 6, Milutinovic indicated the Serbians were willing to give up most of their demands that have stalled the talks.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Milutinovic repeated his objection to foreign troops backing any deal and said NATO bombing, in the absence of an agreement, would amount to "an aggression and a war crime."

Asked whether the proposed NATO deployment was the major sticking point and the rest was negotiable, Milutinovic said: "Yes, that is right." He said any NATO deployment would "badly damage our sovereignty."



North Korea celebrated the 57th birthday of its leader Kim Jong-il, seen in a file photo, urging its people to remain loyal and defend the leader of the Stalinist nation at the risk of their lives. The famine-hit nation, whose economy has been in dire straits for several years, held events across the country to mark Kim's birthday (Reuters photo)

N. Koreans pledge 'suicidal explosion' for Kim Jong-il

SEOUL (AFP) — Crisis-hit North Korea has urged its people to sacrifice themselves for a "suicidal explosion" to protect reclusive leader Kim Jong-il celebrating his 57th birthday this week, analysts said Tuesday.

Weeks of orchestrated celebrations culminated with a ceremony Monday night attended by thousands of senior cadres from North Korea's 1.1-million-strong armed forces, the cabinet and the ruling Workers' Party, a South Korean analyst said.

"Celebrations were almost over with Monday's ceremony in the April 25 House of Culture. Today, most North Koreans are celebrating Kim's birthday at their homes," he said.

Kim, born on Feb. 16, 1942, was missing from the celebrations in Pyongyang's April 25 House of Culture, but Premier Hong Song-Nam seized the opportunity to extract a pledge of loyalty to the "Dear Leader."

The premier, in his speech carried by North Korea's propaganda machine the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), urged starving North Koreans to defend Kim with their lives and prepare themselves to be heroes through human bomb attacks.

"All the people and the servicemen should consider the slogan 'let us defend the head-

quarters of the revolution headed by the great comrade Kim Jong-il with our lives' to be an eternal creed of struggle and life, under which they should prepare themselves to be heroes through human bomb attack and soldiers ready for suicidal explosion."

Hong also urged the impoverished country to uphold Kim's leadership with loyalty, "not shaken by any storms."

"In order to defend the Korean-style socialism and carry the revolutionary cause of justice to accomplishment, all the party and the entire people should uphold Kim Jong-il's politics, ideas and leadership with loyalty and filial piety," he said.

North Korea has unveiled a voluminous programme of celebrations for Kim's birthday, including a flower show, an international figure-skating competition and a nationwide march to Mountain Paektu where Kim was allegedly born.

Streets and villages have been in a festive mood, with fireworks set off above Paektu, said experts who have monitored North Korea's media.

An "evening gala" took place Monday, with army generals dancing together with soldiers, said KCNA monitored in Seoul.

Students and young people held a separate rally praising Kim as the "destiny and future

of the country and people and the symbol of victory," it said.

The festivities, however, have been overshadowed by reports of widespread famine and speculation that the Stalinist country is on the road to ruin.

Some U.S. sources have said that up to 10 per cent of North Korea's population of around 24 million have died as a result of famine and starvation over the past three years.

South Korean intelligence officials claimed the North had spent more than \$100 million on celebrations, enough cash to feed thousands of people.

North Korea could not feed its population, officials were buying rice, sugar and household electronic appliances abroad to be given to party officials in Kim's name, they said.

Kim Jong-il, son of North Korea's founding father Kim Il-Sung, was confirmed as the country's top leader last September when he was reappointed as head of the powerful National Defence Commission.

It took four years for him to complete the first Communist dynastic succession.

He has for decades been a silent figure in the shadows of his father's dominant political legacy, with the few reliable details about his life drowned out by propaganda or myth.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Romanian miners' protest revived

PETROSANI, Romania (AFP) — A protest by Romanian miners which shook the Romanian government last month was revived Tuesday as hundreds of pitmen headed for Bucharest after their leader, Miron Cozma, was handed a jail sentence. An AFP reporter saw a first group of 300 miners leaving the Jiu Valley, a key coal-producing region, aboard a convoy of buses. Several hundred others were waiting for transport. On Monday, Romania's supreme court handed down an 18-month term to firebrand miners' leader Miron Cozma over a 1991 march on Bucharest which brought down the government. Last month Cozma led an aborted march on the Romanian capital from Jan. 18-22, which only ended after he held personal negotiations with Premier Radu Vasile on demands over pay and pit closure plans.

Four cars explode outside Uzbekistan government building

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan (AP) — Four cars exploded almost simultaneously Tuesday following a shootout in front of Uzbekistan's government headquarters. Police and witnesses said at least seven people were killed. A fifth explosion went off later in the lobby of the government building, witnesses added. The violence erupted before a cabinet session was to begin, but no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. The trouble began when a car broke through a cordon in front of the government building in the capital Tashkent, prompting security guards to open fire. A shootout ensued, and two attackers were killed, said a policeman, who declined to give his name. The car then exploded, and three more cars nearby also exploded, all within a minute of the original blast. Afterward, witnesses said they saw the bodies of seven people that were killed — the two assailants and five civilians. One person was detained, the policeman added. "By all appearances it was a terrorist act because the cars all blew up at the same time," the Emergency Situations Committee said in a statement. Uzbekistan's authoritarian President Islam Karimov rushed to the scene following the blast. Karimov has cracked down on political opponents and has drawn criticism from international human rights groups. There has been sporadic unrest in Uzbekistan in recent years, but Karimov is considered to have a firm grip on power.

Prosecution uproar as indictment in eco-journalist trial leaked

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia (AFP) — Military prosecutors were up in arms Tuesday after an eight-page indictment of Russian naval journalist Grigory Pasko, on trial here for treason, was leaked to the press. Pasko, 34, was arrested in November 1997 and accused by Russian security agents of "high treason" handing over military secrets to Japan. His trial is closed to the public and the indictment, which includes a list of military personnel who plan to testify for the defence and a detailed account of the court case, is guarded as secret. Prosecutors have pinpointed the leak to the Russian human-rights watchdog group called the Glasnost Defence Foundation. A foundation spokesman in Moscow said his group received the indictment by a mass-circulated e-mail dated Vladivostok and could not identify the original sources of the leak. "I don't know who sent out the indictment," said the foundation's managing director Oleg Panfilov. "Whoever did, it should not hurt Pasko because everyone can now see how weak their case really is." Pasko, an investigative journalist who also worked for the Pacific Fleet's newspaper, exposed illegal dumping of chemical and liquid radioactive waste by the fleet in the Sea of Japan. The video footage was handed over to Japan's NHK television, where it was featured in a report about ecological crimes committed by the Russian military. The journalist's case has received international attention, with Amnesty International declaring Pasko a prisoner of conscience. He faces up to 20 years in jail if convicted. Pasko's lawyers have dismissed the evidence against their client, saying the information was already in the public domain and that the FSB investigation was biased.

Indian court slaps contempt notices on air traffic controllers

NEW DELHI (AFP) — An Indian court slapped contempt notices on striking air traffic controllers Tuesday for violating a court order by "harassing" domestic and international passengers. The Delhi high court said in its order that it had directed the controllers (ATCs) three years ago to take the court "into confidence" before going on a strike. Judge Dalveer Bhandari said the court had also formed a three-member panel to look into the pay increases. "Despite all these, the ATCs have resorted to agitational path when the matter is still pending in court... deliberate delay of flights has caused difficulties to passengers and prima facie the passengers are harassed," Bhandari said. He told the air traffic controllers' guild "not to take any step causing disruption of flights. It is also restrained from adopting the go-slow programme at all the airports, including five international airports." Monday the government deployed military personnel across Indian airports to regulate traffic following a two-week "go slow" by ATCs demanding higher wages on a par with pilots. The controllers have threatened an all-out strike if any member was "victimised." The action by the controllers has led to major delays of domestic and international flights. Several rounds of talks with the government have failed to break the ice. The controllers' guild has denied responsibility for the delays, blaming a new navigational system at the New Delhi airport instead. A guild spokesman said the failure of the new system, equipment and procedures were causing delays in New Delhi which sparked off a chain reaction elsewhere.

U.S. marine gets 20 months in prison for hit-and-run

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese court sentenced a U.S. marine to 20 months in prison Tuesday for the fatal hit-and-run last year of a teenager on the southern island of Okinawa. Marine Cpl. Randall M. Eskridge, 23, of LaPorte, Indiana, pleaded guilty to the Oct. 7 accident, when the car he was driving struck the small motorcycle that 18-year-old Yuki Uema was riding. Eskridge fled the scene. Uema died of head injuries a week later at a hospital. The prosecution had asked for a 30-month sentence for Eskridge, who was charged with hit-and-run, death through professional negligence and drunken driving. The court decided to put Eskridge in prison for a year and eight months, said Osamu Shimada, a spokesman for Naha District Court. Okinawans have long resented having most of the 47,000 American troops in Japan stationed on their tiny island, 1,600 kilometres southwest of Tokyo. Under Japanese law, a conviction on injuring someone while driving carries a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison or a 500,000 yen (\$4,310) fine.

Congo rebels launch offensive, say Kabila's allies

HARARE (AFP) — Rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have launched a major offensive on all fronts, military allies of President Laurent Kabila said Tuesday.

Zimbabwe's government-controlled media quoted a Southern African Development Community (SADC) Task Force Headquarters statement as saying that the rebel offensive was most intense in the north and southeast.

SADC members Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia — along with Chad — have troops in the DRC in support of Kabila. The statement said the rebels had engaged in a massive recruitment drive and had acquired "new weapons of high calibre."

It said their objective was

to capture Gbadolite in the north. Kamina and Mbuji-Mayi in Katanga province and Lubumbashi in the south before launching an offensive to take the capital Kinshasa.

"While the SADC allied countries are fully devoted and committed to the current peace initiatives, they will use all available resources to deny the invaders any chance of a total military victory," the statement said.

"SADC allied forces are currently engaged in battles with the invading troops along the Congo River, notably in the general area of Kabalo and along Lake Tanganyika in Moba," it said.

The statement accused the "invaders" — meaning rebel-supporters Uganda

and Rwanda — of using current peace negotiations to achieve military gains.

"They pretend to talk peace while on the ground they are intensifying the war effort," the statement said.

Efforts to broker a peace in the DRC have repeatedly collapsed because Kabila and his allies refuse to negotiate directly with rebel leaders, accusing them of being mere puppets of Uganda and Rwanda.

Zimbabwean President Frederick Chiluba, who is the chief mediator in the conflict, is still trying to arrange a regional summit for the signing of a ceasefire agreement.

The summit has been postponed four times since it was first scheduled for early December.

Castro defends proposal to expand death penalty

HAVANA (AP) — Fidel Castro defended his proposal to expand the use of the death penalty to combat crime, saying capital punishment in Cuba would be applied only through strict legal means.

Summary executions by death squads — once common in some parts of Latin America — would never be tolerated in Cuba, Castro told a special session of Cuban lawmakers Monday.

But changes in the criminal justice system such as making drug trafficking a capital crime and lengthening prison terms for alien smuggling are necessary to save the government, Castro said.

An affirmative, unanimous vote was expected at the end of the session, expected to continue Tuesday.

The proposal would increase Cuba's longest prison sentence from 20 years to 30 years, and would lengthen terms for repeat offenders. It also would expand the use of the death penalty — now rarely imposed — and the use of life sentences.

The get-tough legislation comes six weeks after Castro called for harsher sentencing, saying that drug traffickers "deserve capital punishment." The death penalty was common in the 1960s and 1970s, but has been rare in the past two decades.

During his Jan. 5 speech celebrating the 40th anniversary of the National Revolutionary Police, Castro called Cuba's growing crime problem a threat to the revolution.

Castro noted Monday that the death penalty has opponents, including Parliament

Deputy Raul Suarez, who also is a Baptist minister.

"But we are against the death of the country," he said, to applause from lawmakers. "The country has to be saved. That is an absolute priority." In recent weeks, two Cuban men convicted of killing a pair of Italian tourists were sentenced to death. The sentence has automatically been appealed to Cuba's Supreme Court.

Once notably free of street crime and violence, Cuba has seen a surge in prostitution, robbery and theft — even murder — in recent years.

Amid continuing economic crisis brought on by the collapse of the former Soviet bloc, declining state rations have made it hard for many residents to live on state salaries that average \$10 a month.

Group protests fat-bashing ads used by popular fitness chain

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — If space aliens land on Earth, would they demand "Take me to your leader" or "Take me to your eater"? That's the question behind a billboard ad campaign by 24 Hour Fitness which depicts a hungry space alien with the caption: "When they come, they will eat the fat ones first."

That month-old slogan has infuriated more than 30 "fat rebels" who came out Monday to protest the ad and the anti-fat ethos they say is prevalent in many gyms.

"It's really hard for fat people to get into the gym anyway. To alienate them before they even walk in the door is cruel," said Rebekah Bridges, who handed out lollipops to passers-by.

"I may be fat, but I'm fit. I'm happy, I'm sexual, I'm all of

those things. How dare an ad-man decide for society that we're not allowed to be someplace," Ms. Bridges said.

She was joined on the sidewalk by several other larger women and men who chanted "Eat me!"

A fitness trainer for the rival World Gym even ran an impromptu aerobics session during the sidewalk protest, leading four participants through a rigorous high-kneed, arm-pumping routine.

Others waved handwritten signs that read "Fat and Fit" and "Honk If You're Fat," which received loud support from traffic on the busy downtown street.

Company officials say they didn't intend to offend anyone. "Sometimes humour helps make things easier, and can even be motivational," 24 Hour

Fitness said in a statement. Carlsbad-based 24 Hour Fitness has 284 gyms in 10 Western states, Europe and Asia.

Marilyn Wann, who organized the protest, said the company's ad isn't funny, and took her "fat rebels" to the front lines to be seen and heard.

"We've got an epidemic of eating disorders, an epidemic of exercise disorders, people who have to work out twice a day or they're not worthy human beings," Ms. Wann said.

Bob Jancula, a club member for 12 years who works out twice a week, said the ad was heavy-handed. "I thought the ad was very inappropriate. It was stupid," he said.

Ms. Wann said she'd like to see the company retract the ads and work with fat advocates to fill out its membership.



A park ranger feeds the aurochs at Plesskiy national park. In 1986 more than 20,000 people were evacuated from this land within a radius of 30-km of the Chernobyl atomic power plant as it spewed radiation across Europe in the world's worst nuclear accident. Today, the zone, marked on maps of the country with an ominous purplish blotch, has become the world's first radioactive nature reserve (Reuters photo)

In Canada's far north, voters elect first government of new territory

IQALUIT, Northwest Territories (AP) — Decades of dreams and hard-nosed negotiations came close to realization as voters in the eastern Arctic chose the first government of Nunavut, a new territory to be created April 1.

Across a frigid region bigger than Alaska, residents in some of Canada's most remote villages voted Monday.

About 80 per cent of Nunavut's 25,000 people are Inuit, and the new government is expected to be the first in Canada — except for tribal councils — controlled by an aboriginal people.

A total of 71 candidates competed for 19 seats in the legislature of Nunavut.

Some of the victors were already calling for the newly elected legislators to meet within days even though the eastern Arctic territory doesn't split off from the old Northwest Territories until April 1. It's the first change to the map of Canada since the entry of Newfoundland in 1949.

"I'm not going to wait a couple of weeks to get together because I think the political direction has to start now — within days," said Jack Anawak, one of the new legislators.

The new territory has no political parties; the members of the legislature will choose the premier and cabinet from among themselves on April 1.

With the upset defeat of Northwest Territories Deputy Premier Goo Arlooktoo, Anawak, a two-time Liberal member of Parliament and former interim commissioner of Nunavut, is considered a front-runner for the post of premier.

Five of the new legislators are members of the current Northwest Territories legislature.

"I think expectations are

very high. It's been 25 years in the making and we will not be able to meet everybody's expectations," said Kevin O'Brien, who will be moving from the Northwest Territories legislature to the Nunavut chamber.

Despite the challenges, O'Brien said people are looking forward to running their own show for the first time.

"This is pretty exciting. It's history. We know that we can make a difference. In the end, the people will be well served with a government that's closer to home."

People gathered throughout Nunavut to watch the election results come in as the polls closed at 8 p.m. in each of the vast territory's three time zones.

One of the biggest gatherings was in Nunavut's capital of Iqaluit on Baffin Island, where more than 100 people came to a high school gym to watch the results posted.

"I'm happy, I'm very very happy," said Jobie Nutarak, who Monday evening became the first member of the territorial legislature to be declared a winner. "It's going to be lots of fun and lots of work."

Candidates, who had been campaigning in -20 F (-30 C) temperatures, said voter interest was high.

Anawak said the election should be a positive example for aboriginals elsewhere in Canada and abroad.

"This will showcase to the world that we as Inuit can run a public government focusing on our own issues without forgetting others as well," he said.

Nunavut faces serious challenges. One-third of its residents receive welfare, and the unemployment rate is 22 per cent.

The territory came about as a result of land claim negotiations with the Inuit that began in the mid-'70s.

Chinese welcome Year of the Rabbit

BEIJING (AFP) — Bells rang and firecrackers banged as millions of Chinese ushered in the Lunar New Year across Asia Tuesday, praying the region would overcome economic turmoil in the Year of the Rabbit.

Beijingers rang in the Year of the Rabbit at midnight (1600 GMT Monday) with 108 strikes of a giant bronze bell, while in Shanghai local residents went wild in a deafening extravaganza of fireworks which deafened the city.

Temples in Taiwan were covered in a pull of incense smoke as residents of Taipei flocked to the city's Hsing Tien Temples to pray for a better year than the economically catastrophic Year of the Tiger just gone.

Thousands of people packed Chaoan Temple in Taiwan's central Peikang town before the door opened at 12:55 a.m., the lucky time for opening of the temple for the Lunar New Year according to the Chinese almanac.

Recession-hit Hong Kong's Taoist faithful flocked to Wong

Tai-Sin Temple to pray for wealth and health. Wong Tai-Sin, a Taoist deity believed to hold the power to grant wishes, is popular among Hong Kong people, especially businessmen.

In Beijing, hundreds of revellers met at the Great Bell Temple in the northeast of the city at midnight to witness the annual ringing of the world's biggest bell in use.

The number 108 is considered auspicious as it is a multiple of 12 (the number of months in the year) and of nine, traditionally signifying heaven and the emperor. Eight is the number denoting fortune.

At the 108th strike, the crowds greeted each other with cries of "Gongxi faai" (good wishes and prosperity). Bursts of firecrackers sounded in the distance despite a ban on their use.

But their compatriots in Shanghai led China in the noise stakes, exploding hundreds of rockets and thousands of strings of red firecrackers from alleyways, rooftops and apartment windows.

An employee at one hospital said seven people were admitted with fireworks-related injuries, about the same number as in 1998.

In Beijing 20 were treated at one hospital for eye injuries from mishandled fireworks in spite of a city-wide ban, the Beijing Daily reported.

Tuesday in Shanghai sporadic firecracker explosions echoed around the city during the day as street-sweepers struggled to clear up mountains of burnt red paper and cardboard debris.

And Vietnamese in Hanoi welcomed their Year of the Cat, equivalent to the Rabbit, with firecrackers to ward off evil spirits, returning home to pray to their ancestors and exchange presents. Thousands of Hanoi residents thronged the promenade around Hoan Kiem Lake at midnight for a New Year fireworks display.

"It's wonderful to have the fireworks again," said Duong.

Indonesia to propose East Timor join ASEAN

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesia will sponsor East Timor as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) if the troubled territory opts for independence, a senior official said here Tuesday.

Dewi Fortuna Anwar, foreign affairs advisor to President B.J. Habibie said it would be "in Indonesia's interests" if the former Portuguese colony joined the regional grouping.

"It is not in our interests if a country in the area is not in tune with the others," Anwar told a journalists' seminar here, adding the "spectre" that a foreign power would establish as base there was a thing of the past.

"There is no real fear any more that a foreign power will have a base in East Timor. This consideration was a concern in 1975, (but) this spectre is no longer relevant," she added.

Moreover, she said: "The influence of a small and poor country will be limited. It is more a country which needs help and assistance, than a country which might dictate."

In 1975, Indonesia, with the tacit blessing of the United States at the time of its debacle in South Vietnam, invaded the former Portuguese colony where Marxists and Communists had considerable influence at the time.

ASEAN now groups nine countries of the region: Burma, Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Anwar also rejected the idea that eventual independence of East Timor could set a "bad example" for other restless Indonesian provinces, notably Aceh in North Sumatra and Irian Jaya.

"The problem of East Timor has a different histo-

ry. Aceh, Irian Jaya ... we proclaimed independence together. East Timor was a different case, a colonial backwater, totally useless, they joined us 30 years later."

"There is no risk of a spillover," she added, making no reference to the fact that Irian Jaya, which shares a land border with independent Papua New Guinea, did not join Indonesia until the 1960s.

Separatist groups are both active in Aceh and Irian Jaya.

Considered close to Habibie, Anwar is believed to have been party to Jakarta's abrupt January 27 about-face on the question of East Timor, which Indonesia annexed a year after the 1975 invasion.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas meanwhile said Habibie's announcement last week he wanted to see a free East Timor by Jan. 1 was not a deadline.

"This is not a deadline, but a hope that starting in the year 2000, we would be freed of the burden of a settlement of the problem of East Timor," Alatas said according to the Antara news agency.

He called the date a "peg" for a time where Indonesia will no longer be hampered by the question of a settlement on East Timor.

"We do not want to be burdened by the problem of East Timor as of Jan. 1, 2000," Habibie said last week.

Alatas also said Lisbon, which is still regarded by the United Nations and most states as the official administrator of East Timor, would abide by the decision of the people of East Timor — whether they chose independence or autonomy under the Indonesian flag.

The broad autonomy package is currently being finalised between Indonesia and Portugal in talks held

Indonesian opposition leader blames Suharto for bloodshed

INDONESIAN OPPOSITION leader Amien Rais charged here Tuesday that former President Suharto's "pyramid of power" was intact and blamed the fallen leader's clique for the bloody riots plaguing the country.

In a blistering attack on the establishment, Rais, founder of the National Mandate Party (PAN) and a presidential hopeful, also called Suharto's successor, President B.J. Habibie, the former president's "shadow."

"Habibie is the shadow of Suharto, the attorney-general is his spokesman and the chief of the army is loyal to Suharto," he told a seminar here.

"Bloodshed is everywhere from Merak to Sabang. What is the goal of those who are behind it?" he said.

He said as a result of the confusion some military leaders hoped the people will "submit to the military."

Speaking to a forum of Asian and German journalists here, the moderate

Muslim reformist gave possible motives for the violence: "To distract the attention from Mr. Suharto and his family, to cancel the elections to lengthen the status quo and protect their interests."

This would, he said, create "a political and social disaster" through which the military hoped to strengthen their role.

"The bloody incidents will not derail the process of reform. The military, the most significant power holders, must talk with us," said Rais, who has in the past blamed those close to Suharto for the bloodshed in recent months.

Rais' party, along with that of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the popular politician daughter of former president Sukarno, appear to be among the front runners in general elections promised by Habibie for June 7.

Both have been nominated by their parties as candidates for the next presidency, a post Habibie has indicated he might run for if chosen by the ruling Golkar party and which should be filled in November.

Mahathir to tour Malaysia to counter 'propaganda'

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced Tuesday to begin a nationwide tour to counter what he called propaganda by government opposition, news reports said.

Mahathir said his tour of Malaysia would begin Thursday with a three-day visit to eastern Sabah state ahead of an upcoming state election.

Voter sentiment in Sabah polls is widely seen as the litmus test for Mahathir's ruling coalition. Exact dates have not yet been announced for the state poll or a general election, which must be called before April 2000.

Mahathir was quoted by the national Bernama news agency as saying his nationwide tour was needed to clear up confusion caused by "intense propaganda" from government opponents.

"I believe the people do not have full information. So I will use the opportunity during my meeting with the people to make clarification. I feel as a politician, it is my duty," Mahathir was quoted as saying.

The 73-year-old leader has faced an unprecedented anti-government movement since he sacked his popular longtime protégé Anwar Ibrahim in September.

Ex-finance minister named joint candidate in Nigerian elections

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Former Finance Minister Olu Falae was named the joint presidential nominee for two of Nigeria's three political parties Tuesday, setting him against a retired general in the upcoming elections.

Officials with the All Peoples Party and the Alliance for Democracy agreed early Tuesday morning on a joint candidacy for Falae, following weeks of political and legal wrangling over such a plan.

The 60-year-old former government official will face retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo — the candidate of Nigeria's leading party, the Peoples Democratic Party — in the Feb. 27 presidential vote.

Despite the backing of two parties, Falae still has a difficult campaign to overcome the political power and financial backing of Obasanjo and his party.

The linkage of the AD and the APP is surprising at first glance, because the Alliance for Democracy is largely composed of Yorubas from Nigeria's southwest and is led by a number of prominent opponents of the country's late dictator, Gen. Sani Abacha. The All Peoples Party, meanwhile, includes many politicians who built their careers through loyalty to Abacha.

But the presidential parties and candidates have shown little in the way of ideology so far, with candidates offering little

Antarctic toothfish stocks mysteriously plummet

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) — About 90 per cent of the highly prized Antarctic toothfish have mysteriously vanished from around Australia's Macquarie Island in the last year, baffling scientists and alarming environmentalists.

Toothfish stocks were estimated at more than 35,000 metric tonnes in 1997, when measurement and tracking began, but plummeted to about 2,220 tonnes in 1998, Australian Fisheries Management Authority spokeswoman Trish Stone said Tuesday.

"The decline can't accountably be explained by the take of the legal fishing industry," she said, and the area has apparently been free of the poaching ships plundering other Antarctic waters.

The huge decline in numbers may have been related to shifts in ocean currents or climate effects, Stone said, but she said there is no explanation so far.

A meeting in Hobart of Australian government scientists studying Antarctic fisheries Monday first reported the massive drop in the population around Macquarie Island, about 1,500 km southeast of Hobart.

The environmental group Greenpeace called for the area to be closed to toothfish fishing.

"At this stage it is thought that the stocks may have been fished out or that the fish may have moved on to somewhere else, but that is unlikely so it's a mystery at the moment," Greenpeace oceans campaigner Darren

Gladman said.

"If the small Macquarie Island fishery cannot be managed properly, what hope is there for toothfish in the rest of the Southern Ocean," Gladman added.

Popular in Japan and the United States for its white oily flesh, toothfish is so valuable in the fishing industry that it is known as "white gold."

Pirate fishing in waters off Antarctica is rampant with up to 90 per cent of the total toothfish catch in some areas taken by illegal and unregulated fishing ships, according to Greenpeace.

But Keith Sainsbury, who chairs the group of scientists from the Australian federal science agency, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and the Australian

Antarctic Division, said Greenpeace had misinterpreted the data and reached an invalid conclusion.

"We are very concerned that the toothfish be monitored and protected, but speculation of this type clouds the issue and is really not helpful," Sainsbury said.

Scientists had gone out once in 1997 and again last year and found far fewer fish.

"But that doesn't mean that 90 per cent of the fish have been fished out, it just means that we didn't find them," he said.

"Anyone who has ever owned a fishing rod knows how that goes," Sainsbury said only 800 metric tonnes had been taken from the area by legal fishing, which did not start to account for the gap in the numbers.

Ayatollah still casts shadow over new dawn

By Robert Fisk

NOT LONG after he returned to Iran, I had my only chance to talk to Ayatollah Khomeini.

We had been shown his thin blankets on the humble concrete floor of his home in Qom, told of the yoghurt that he ate for breakfast and then shown into a tiny room crowded with Revolutionary Guards and Islamic clerics. The ayatollah lectured us on the evils of America, the necessity of deporting the Shah back to Iran for trial and the eternal nature of the Islamic Republic.

A small crack in the sun-drenched window had cast a pool of light on the floor; at this emanation, the ayatollah stared throughout our conversation. It was as if he was transfixed by this light; he never took his eyes off it.

It was half an hour before we grasped the fact that he would not look at us. He spoke in a slow, rasping but quiet voice, his words translated by Sadeq Qotbzadeh, his ally in Parisian exile whom he equally ignored.

A few years later, he would acquiesce in Qotbzadeh's execution for plotting against the Islamic Republic. Here, indeed, was a revolution that could consume its children.

Would the revolution, whose 20th anniversary Iranians celebrated yesterday, have been any different — any

more generous — if Saddam Hussein had not invaded Iran in 1980 to the hope of destroying the new regime?

Already, the revolution's enemies in Tehran were being strung up or put before firing squads. I returned to Qom a few weeks later to report on the trial of a staff sergeant in the Shah's army, accused of firing at demonstrators in the last days of the Shah. The crowd in the courtroom demanded his death and I tried desperately to explain to the American-educated brother of the doomed man that the presence of a Western reporter would not spare him. I told the judge, privately, that I regarded mercy as the greatest of virtues. I was wasting my time.

There were no velvet gloves in the Iranian revolution. And after Saddam sent his legions across the frontier, I found myself in a troop train travelling north from the battlefields of Ahwaz, its dying passengers coughing the mustard gas out of their lungs into white handkerchiefs.

At the battle of the Fish Lake, young men took off their helmets to show their fearlessness amid the shellfire, the corpses of their Iraqi enemies piled around them, the shells hissing into the Somme-like mud. I spent an afternoon in a dug-out with Iran's young boy soldiers, some of them only nine, village boys with miniature swords of paradise hanging

around their necks to ensure their place in the next world.

When they rode their mopeds through the Iraqi minefields, they wore greatcoats in the heat — so that every part of their shattered bodies could be returned for burial.

Saddam was our man then. And when they've called for our support in bombing Iraq, not once have Western leaders mentioned those tens of thousands of Iranian victims of Saddam's butchery. That would be asking too much; besides, without the Iraqi invasion, the ferocious anger of the Iranian revolution may have cooled earlier.

In the event, Khomeini — these are his words — "ate poison" when faced with the collapse of his Western front in 1988. In revenge, the regime turned on its imprisoned opponents. Young Iranian men and women, interrogated and lashed, many of them having already served their time in jail, were berded into courtyards for mass executions, banged like thrushes on groaning scaffolds. Perhaps 8,000 died, some say many more.

In the new Iranian era, it is sometimes difficult — in the streets of Tehran or talking to the liberal, intelligent, bright young men now running part of the government — to imagine what cruelty was acted out in the Islamic Republic's name.

And with a president as admired as

Mohammed Khatami — democratically elected and more popular among his people than Israel's elected leaders — it seems almost churlish to remember the brutality of what went before.

But Iran's intransigent clerics are still there, as loyal to their dead Imam as the boys who drove to their death through the minefields. The Islamic Republic still has a Khomeini-inspired Supreme Leader — Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — and it still has its enemies.

Khatami's brave attempt to open a dialogue with the United States was rebuffed by an administration whose Middle East policies are virtually identical with Israel's. Only this week, Martin Indyk, the former head of the most powerful Israeli lobby group in America and now U.S. Under-Secretary of State, was asking for Arab support for the old, discredited policy of dual — i.e., Iraqi and Iranian — "containment." Has the memory of the 1979 siege of the U.S. embassy and the long months of imprisonment for its diplomats infected the Americans as deeply as the cruelty of the Shah neutered the compassion of the Iranians?

Alas, the brutality still exists. Even as Tehran was preparing its jazz bands and religious ceremonies to commemorate the revolution, an old Iranian woman was sentenced to amputa-

'...when they've called for our support in bombing Iraq, not once have Western leaders mentioned those tens of thousands of Iranian victims of Saddam's butchery'

tion and then hanging for the murder of two young women. Only weeks after President Khatami was elected, a convicted Afghan rapist — his crimes were, of course, truly terrible — was publicly hanged from a crane, his corpse suspended 300ft above a crowd.

This is not the future of Iran, merely a reminder of the harshness of its revolution. Khatami, if he is not

betrayed by his internal opponents — or destroyed by the Americans who claimed they wanted to be his friends — may yet turn Iran into one of the great peacemakers of the Middle East.

A laughable idea? What about the new missiles Iran is constructing? Or the reports of chemical warfare preparations? Or the old torturers still at large?

Well, how many other Middle East countries — Israel as well as the Arab nations — can claim to have no long-range missiles, no chemical warfare capability, no cruel old men in retirement?

The tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini is now a Shi'ite shrine of epic proportions, lit up so brightly that airforce pilots can see its golden lights from 50 miles away. Was it not he who said that wherever oppression existed in the world, Iran would be fighting against it? Was it not he who said that "we are men of war and we shall export our revolution to the entire world — until the cry of 'Allahu Akbar' reigns over the world, the struggle shall continue?"

Two years after the old man's death, the West might pause to ask itself if there is still oppression and betrayal in the Middle East and to reflect upon the revolutionary forces that could still be stirred by its barbarity.

— The Independent

Venice pigeons ruffle feathers

By Philip Pullella
Reuters

THE TALK of the town in Venice these days is out of high technology to stop flooding.

Nor is it about a splendid exhibition on the Mayans. It is about something much more pedestrian — pigeons and their droppings.

Mayor Massimo Cacciari has ruffled the feathers of animal rights activists by ruling that many of the famed black birds that carpet areas such as St. Mark's Square will have to be put down because they carry disease.

To protest against his ruling several hundred animal rights activists recently marched through the square — Italy's largest pedestrian island — blowing a "bugle of death" for the birds.

The protesters — who say the birds should not be killed but cured and sterilised — held a mock funeral, with some wearing mourning masks and carrying coffins.

Cacciari, acting on a warning from the local health department, decided that something had to be done about the estimated 120,000 pigeons in the city.

Apart from the damage to monuments such as St. Mark's Basilica, city officials say many of the birds are sick and are potential transmitters of disease.

Health authorities found that about half the birds caught in initial round-ups so far were found to be carrying salmonella or the chlamydia bacteria, which can cause trachoma, a disease which can sometimes lead to blindness.

Animal rights activists responded to Cacciari's ruling by filing a suit with a regional court.

They accused him of violating laws against mistreating animals and contravening legislation on hunting because the birds are caught with nets when they are rounded up.

Cacciari, a professor of philosophy at Venice university, took the accusations, well... philosophically.

"Dear friends, precise laws dictate that a mayor has to protect the health of his citizens. I respect and will continue to respect such laws," he said in an open letter to newspapers.

The mayor said he was at peace with his conscience that the plans to put down some birds and eventually

sterilise others will be guided by "common sense."

Cacciari continued: "Don't bother filing suits against the city or signing petitions against me. They certainly will do me less damage than that caused by the pigeons." Cristina Romieri, head of the local animal rights group, condemned the round-up of the birds as "birth control by death."

She says rounding up the pigeons with nets groups healthy and sick birds indiscriminately.

"We don't agree with this very cruel method," she told Reuters, adding that the wings of some birds are broken in the operation. She said the birds are later gassed.

She also said the group's own veterinary surgeons were waiting to see the results of the tests showing the birds were carrying bacteria, saying they were "open to interpretation."

Romieri accused the local media of waging a "terrorist press campaign against the pigeons."

Polls show Cacciari has most of the denizens of Venice on his side.

In one poll in the city's La Nuova Venezia newspaper, some 79.9 per cent of those questioned said they believed the number of pigeons in the city had to be reduced somehow.

Nearly 48 per cent said they wanted sick birds to be killed immediately and for healthy birds to be fed birth control in their food.

Only 20.5 per cent said they believed only birth control should be used to get a grip of the problem.

Since pigeons in Venice mate as many as eight times a year, some experts believe that one way to stop them from reproducing so much is to force them to go hunting for food rather than hunting for mates.

If they have to go looking for food they will have less time to mate, some experts say. That means not feeding the birds in the square, where traditionally tourists buy bags of maize for \$1.25 and then wait for the attack.

But can a city like Venice ask or order tourists not to feed the pigeons? To some, that would be like asking visitors to Disneyland not to have their picture taken with Mickey Mouse. Venice and pigeons even figure in the only picture police had of Mafia boss Toto Riina for the 23 years he was on the run before his arrest in 1993.

Riina, who spent most of his time

'...there will be initial round-ups and then we will decide how many are sick and will have to be put down and how many will have to have their reproductive cycles controlled'

ordering mob hits, relaxed with his children like any ordinary father and smiled into the camera as he fed the birds while he was on the run.

Mario Scatolin, the Venice city official whose office is overseeing project pigeon, said it was still not clear how many birds will have to be put down.

"First, there will be initial round-ups and then we will decide how many are sick and will have to be put down and how many will have to have their reproductive cycles controlled," he told Reuters.

Scatolin said limiting food in the square may not be enough because the pigeons just find food elsewhere in the alleyways of the canal city.

"You tell me where there is another city where there are 1,000 bars and restaurants in such a small area," he said.

Scatolin said the fact that many of the birds were believed to be carrying salmonella and other bacteria was cause enough for city officials to be worried.

"If there is a single case of an infection by salmonella caused by a pigeon, I don't think anyone can contest the suppression. We want to prevent infection," Scatolin said.

"If disease spreads among animals in the wild that's one thing. If it happens in a city of 65,000 people with nine million visitors a year, that's another."

Russian veterans still bitter a decade after Afghan exit

By Oleg Shchedrov
Reuters

A DECADE after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, many veterans feel as bitter and disillusioned as ever about the nine-year war.

"The best present the government could get for the 10th anniversary of the withdrawal would be if we all disappeared," said Boris Zhdanov, knocking back a generous shot of vodka.

Once a year, Zhdanov — among the last soldiers to leave Afghanistan in February 1989 — visits the grave of his friend Nikolai who died two months before the Soviet pullout.

"At least his gravestone says where he died," Zhdanov said, sprinkling another glass of vodka over the grave in a traditional Russian gesture. "Relatives of soldiers who had been killed earlier were not allowed to mention that for fear of 'demoralising the population'." In December 1979, the Soviet Union sent 80,000 troops into Afghanistan to support the leaders it had installed there.

The operation was planned as a "little victorious war" meant to thwart Western-backed Islamist rebels and subdue growing discontent over economic and social problems at home.

But the full-scale war proved too expensive for the creaking Soviet economy and the flow of zinc coffins with the bodies of dead soldiers, most of which were delivered in secrecy, only compounded the unpopularity of the ageing Soviet leadership.

The glasnost policy of more public openness encouraged by Kremlin leader Mikhail Gorbachev after he came to power in 1985 exposed the truth about the Soviet role in Afghanistan and the atrocities of the war, fuelling public rage and making withdrawal inevitable.

On February 15, 1989, the last Soviet commander in Afghanistan, General Boris Gromov, crossed a border bridge to complete the pullout. Behind him lay one million dead Afghans and the memory of 15,000 comrades in arms who perished.

"Perhaps glasnost was good, but when we came back home people treated us as criminals, as if we started the war," Zhdanov said. "We did not send you there" was the mildest answer one could get turning for official assis-

tance. The all-pervading distaste for the Afghan war waned in the years to follow — a period that included the collapse of communism, a series of regional wars and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in former Soviet republics in Asia and some southern Russian regions.

Russian troops are stationed even now in Tajikistan helping the government to stop Afghan Islamic guerrillas spreading their influence in the poverty-stricken Central Asian state.

Between 1994 and 1996 tens of thousands of people died in Russia's southern region of Chechnya, where Moscow waged an ill-fated war against separatist rebels in an operation often likened to the Afghan invasion.

Many public and political leaders say that to keep the Islamic threat at bay in Afghanistan was perhaps more reasonable than to resist it too in Tajikistan or Chechnya.

"I am not sorry for what happened in Afghanistan," said Yuri Drozdov, who retired from the Soviet KGB security service in 1991 as a major-general and played an important role in the covert operation to install a client administration in Kabul.

"I am very sorry that the leadership failed to assess fully the situation which arose at that time and, as a result of ill-conceived actions, complicated the situation which we are witnessing now," he said, echoing a widespread opinion.

The change of tide in cash-squeezed Russia did little to help up to 800,000 Afghan war veterans. They are effectively left on their own.

"If it were not for veterans' organisations, society would certainly try to forget about us," said Alexander Kovalyov, the head of the Moscow regional association of Afghan veterans, which has 14,000 people including 420 invalids on its books.

"The authorities don't like us because we remind them of the hundreds of thousands of people they sent to war," he said.

Apart from psychological problems suffered by most servicemen after Afghanistan, many veterans endure difficulties with wounds and tropical diseases. Only a few can afford proper medical care.

"I retired as major and with all bene-

fits, including for serving in Afghanistan, I get 800 roubles as a monthly pension, less than \$40," Kovalyov says. "The smallest surgical operation costs at least \$1,000, so you can work it out for yourself." The state has launched several programmes to help the veterans, but few have been carried out because of lack of cash.

The only notable help — tax and import duty exemptions granted for veterans' organisations — proved more of a headache than assistance.

The exemptions, allowing cheap imports of highly profitable goods such as spirits, tobacco and cars, made the veterans' organisations attractive for criminals.

Many turned into fronts for illegal businesses and some of their members into highly qualified hitmen. Several of their leaders have been killed in criminal feuds.

"There is a public presumption that nearly all Afghan war veterans are gangsters," Kovalyov said. "But our estimates show that only one per cent of veterans are involved in criminal businesses, less than in many other social groups." But he agreed the criminal factor existed.

"Well, first of all it was stupid to grant benefits and give no access to credits to use them. One has to borrow money somewhere to use these benefits," Kovalyov said the problem with veterans' businesses was likely to be solved automatically now that the government was planning to scrap most benefits. He could not say the same about the veterans' needs.

"If these benefits go and no replacement is offered, I think the veterans' movement will disappear together with the help it offered," he said.

Despite their woes, most veterans' organisations try to keep their members away from politics. And Kovalyov believes the task is not difficult one.

"We have many politicians waltzing around us, especially before the withdrawal anniversary which coincides with the start of the parliamentary election campaign," he said, referring to December's vote for the State Duma, or lower house.

"But we were taught well not to believe them, not to believe the state. We don't want to be sent to yet another adventure and told later it was a wrong one."

Bloodthirsty emperor tops ratings in graft-ravaged China

By Luisetta Mudie
Agence France Presse

MILLIONS OF television viewers across China are glued nightly to their screens to watch a supreme leader wage a bloody and desperate war against graft and try to revive the country's economy.

The plot could easily be a description of the battles of China's current leaders as they swear to crack down on corrupt officials at the highest levels of government, and refill the coffers of the state.

But the actors in this drama, "The Yongzheng Dynasty," which unfolds every evening on state television, wear the yellow Dragon robes of China's Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) emperors, although the parallels with

present-day China are by no means lost on millions of fans.

"Everyone's glued to it. It's about Emperor Yongzheng, who used to be regarded officially as a bad guy for the harshness of his punishments," said one viewer who never misses an episode. "But now they're changing their view of him because he was so hard on corruption and left a lot of money in the treasury for his successors."

The \$3.1 million series, shown at prime time on China's Central Television (CCTV) Channel 1, has garnered top ratings since it began just over four weeks ago. It has become so talked about that CCTV was forced to start the 44-part series again from episode one on another channel so those who heard about it

but didn't tune in at the start could catch up.

"I think people just like seeing corrupt officials punished," said one woman viewer. "If an official was found to be corrupt in his day, Yongzheng would have their whole family put to death."

China's current leaders, faced with flagging economic growth and pitiful revenues trickling into state coffers, are racing to stem the tide of rampant official corruption lest they, as was the tradition with weakened emperors, lose their mandate to rule.

There are increasing reports of protests from disgruntled peasants and laid off workers. There are acts of despair like the man who walked into a cinema and detonated a belt of explosives he was wearing.

'I think people just like seeing corrupt officials punished'

CCTV's show gives its audience what is becoming rare in real life: a harsh but fair leadership, and a sense of justice for a people and country bled dry by corrupt officials.

Emperor Yongzheng (1678-1735), once regarded with fear and loathing because he killed even his own brothers in his bid to hold onto power, has been rehabilitated to epit-

omise the kind of leadership the Communist Party would like, in its own way, to provide.

"It's a radically different treatment of Yongzheng's rule from that which has gone before," a China Central Television spokesman told AFP.

Former television series have shown Yongzheng as a tyrant who cheated his father, intimidated his mother and killed his brothers. Some tales say he was a womaniser and an alcoholic — others blast him as a tyrant without pastimes.

Yongzheng's image was given its facelift by novelist Ling Jiefang, who provided the basis for the screenplay, and China's leading woman director Hu Mei. The good looks of actor Tang Guoqiang, well known for playing nice young men,

put the finishing touches to the public relations job.

"Yongzheng (was actually) a reform-minded crusader whose policies did help strengthen the country's economic might, reduce the gap between rich and poor and bring about stability," Ling said in a recent interview with the official media.

Yongzheng was said to amend to state affairs from morning to midnight, a hard-working reputation he shares with current Premier Zhu Rongji. Zhu has also reportedly pledged to "kill, kill, kill," in an ongoing crackdown on graft. Whether Zhu's actions will lead to an extension of Communist Party rule for another 100 years, as Yongzheng's did for the Qing Dynasty, history alone will tell.

Financial services liberalisation accord to take effect March 1—WTO

GENEVA (AFP) — An agreement liberalising trade in financial services will take effect from March 1 as scheduled, following a decision this week by 52 governments, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has said.

These governments, including those of the United States, Japan, and all but one of the European Union (EU) states, have already ratified the accord reached in December 1997 at WTO Geneva headquarters.

Backers of the liberalisation pact account for about 95 per cent of global activity in banking, brokerage, insurance, and fund management.

The pact was set to come into force on March 1.

But because 18 governments among the 71 signatory parties, among which is the European Commission, have yet to

finish the required domestic procedures formally to accept the deal, those that have completed the work were given the right to decide whether to start on time, or agree to a delay.

The ones which are ready account for the overwhelming bulk of financial services activity.

Meeting to pronounce on the issue, representatives from 52 governments decided that "the date would not be changed", the WTO said.

"They were confident that these countries would come on board as quickly as their procedures allow them to," a WTO official said.

WTO Director General Renato Ruggiero said that the decision was a vital element in providing stability to the financial sector, particularly in developing countries.

"At a time of instability in global financial markets, this agreement provides a solid foundation for improvement of financial practices, for enlarging the pool of capital available to businesses and consumer and for increasing the transparency of financial operations around the world," Ruggiero said.

Ruggiero urged governments not yet on the list to ratify the protocol as soon as possible, stressing the accord was not aimed at liberalising capital flows but at creating opportunities for businesses to establish footholds and expand overseas.

The WTO's council for trade in services extended the deadline for accepting the pact, known as the fifth protocol to the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services, for another six months starting immediately.

The new cut-off point

is June 15, 1999 in place of an original deadline of Jan. 29.

Most Asian countries who joined the pact have ratified the protocol, including economically hard-hit Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea.

The Philippines is the one notable Asian country still outstanding. Australia, Brazil, Luxembourg and Costa Rica are also among the have-nots.

Though committed to carry out their liberalisation commitments, countries who have not ratified cannot be judged by the WTO's dispute settlement machinery when the financial services pact takes effect.

The deal, struck after nine months of negotiations, and tough last minute bargaining by a handful of countries, chiefly the United States, liberalises key domestic financial sectors to varying degrees

and with differing time frames.

As the United States is already the world's most open banking and insurance market, Washington pressed hard to secure more concessions for its financial services industry, mainly from previously fast-growing economies in Asia.

U.S. negotiators insisted that serious commitments from these countries would reassure investors who had fled the region when the currency and stockmarket turmoil first started in July 1997.

The size of the financial service sector has exploded in the last decade. About \$1.5 trillion are traded daily in the foreign exchange markets and total banking assets are estimated at more than \$20 trillion, and insurance premiums at \$2 trillion.

Israeli consumer prices plunge as recession deepens

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's consumer price index (CPI) dropped 0.5 per cent in January, its biggest monthly fall in decades, in a new sign of the deepening recession in the country.

Economists attributed the surprisingly sharp drop in the index as reported by the state statistics bureau to a combination of lower merchandise prices and a fall in

the value of the dollar which drove down housing costs.

"This is the sharpest drop in the consumer price index in many, many decades," said Neil Sandler, economic analyst for Israeli public radio.

Sandler said winter clothing and shoe sales had contributed to bringing prices down.

But the most significant change was in the price of

housing, which is pegged to the dollar and was driven down by a 7.8 per cent rise in the value of the Israeli shekel against the U.S. currency in December and January, he said.

In a further sign of economic trouble, the Purchasing Managers Index compiled among Israeli companies and a key indicator of business activity fell five per cent from

December to January to hit 40.9 per cent, its lowest level ever.

"This means that the recession is getting deeper and things are not improving," Sandler said.

Analysts said the drop in the price index and other signs of recession would likely lead Israel's central bank to order a bigger than expected cut in its main interest rate when its monetary committee

meets later this month.

The committee had been expected to cut its base rate by 0.33 percentage points, but now might lower it half a point, they said.

Consumer prices rose 8.6 per cent in 1998, compared with seven per cent the previous year — the lowest in three decades.

The CPI rose 0.1 per cent in December.

Exchange Rates Tuesday, 16 Feb 99									
ACCESS 4646868									
CURRENCY	UNIT	JO	US	EURO	YEN	DM	FR	GBP	JPY
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1888	0.1827	1.8778	1.8389	0.1944	2.3324	0.2078	0.7080
SAUDI RIYAL	5.2679	1.0000	1.0208	9.9478	9.7418	1.0300	12.3561	1.1010	3.7507
BAHRAIN DINAR	5.1853	0.9798	1.0000	9.7443	9.5426	1.0089	12.1034	1.0785	3.6740
QATAR RIAL	0.5325	0.1005	0.1026	1.0000	0.9793	0.1035	1.2421	0.1107	0.3770
OMAN RIAL	0.5438	0.1027	0.1048	1.0211	1.0000	0.1057	1.2684	0.1130	0.3850
QATAR RIAL	5.1434	0.9709	0.9912	9.6381	9.4582	1.0000	11.9964	1.0690	3.6418
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4287	0.0809	0.0826	0.8051	0.7884	0.0834	1.0000	0.0891	0.3036
EGYPT POUND	4.8114	0.9082	0.9272	9.0348	8.8478	0.9355	11.2222	1.0000	3.4063
LIBANON LIRA	21.4831	4.0552	4.1399	40.3405	39.5058	4.1769	50.1071	4.4850	15.2100
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2666	0.2722	2.6522	2.5973	0.2746	3.2944	0.2938	1.0000
BRITISH STERLING	0.8982	0.1841	0.1875	1.8322	1.7985	0.1960	2.0274	0.1807	0.6154
GERMAN MARK	2.4653	0.4635	0.4733	4.6311	4.5353	0.4795	5.7523	0.5128	1.7461
SWITZERLAND FR.	2.0158	0.3805	0.3885	3.7853	3.7069	0.3919	4.7017	0.4180	1.4272
JAPANESE YEN	6.2715	1.5814	1.5840	15.5321	15.2106	1.6082	19.8928	1.7151	5.8563
HOLLAND GUILDER	1.8578	0.3128	0.3195	3.1129	3.0485	0.3223	3.8566	0.3445	1.1737
SWEDEN KRONA	2.7788	0.5245	0.5355	5.2181	5.1101	0.5403	6.3814	0.5776	1.9674
ITALY LIRA	11.1850	2.1115	2.1556	21.0049	20.5701	2.1748	26.0903	2.3249	7.9187
FRANCE FRANC	24.4181	4.6089	4.7051	45.8481	44.8990	4.7471	58.6481	5.0745	17.2888
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	50.8580	9.6021	9.8028	95.5419	93.5419	9.8000	118.6445	10.5723	36.0146
CANADA DOLLAR	2.2018	0.4196	0.4243	4.1344	4.0437	0.4281	5.1354	0.4576	1.5588
NEW ZEALAND D.	4.0696	0.7882	0.7942	7.8419	7.6437	0.7912	9.4920	0.8458	2.8813
FINLAND MARKKA	1.3774	0.5172	0.5200	5.1453	5.0388	0.5327	6.3910	0.5695	1.9400
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	17.3515	3.2754	3.3437	32.5824	31.9080	3.3738	40.4707	3.5063	12.2849
INDONESIA RUPIAH	2.1144	0.3991	0.4075	3.9704	3.8882	0.4111	4.9316	0.4395	1.4670
INDONESIA DOLLAR	1.2610	0.2380	0.2430	2.3679	2.3188	0.2452	2.9411	0.2821	0.8928

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR									
CURRENCY	UNIT	JO	US	EURO	YEN	DM	FR	GBP	JPY
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.8246	0.5727	0.7007	0.1708	0.6530	0.5063	5.7848	1.1201
BRITISH STERLING	0.6154	1.0000	0.3625	0.4312	0.1051	0.5343	0.3128	3.5801	0.6593
GERMAN MARK	1.7461	2.8773	1.0000	1.2265	0.2962	1.4877	0.8875	10.1010	1.5558
SWITZERLAND FR.	1.4272	2.3191	0.8174	1.0000	0.2437	1.2180	0.7254	8.2581	1.5588
FRANCE FRANC	5.8563	9.5158	3.3538	4.1033	1.0000	4.6898	2.9795	33.6774	5.5595
JAPANESE YEN	117.3700	190.7145	67.2176	82.2378	20.0419	1.0000	59.6967	678.9859	131.4661
HOLLAND GUILDER	1.9674	3.1988	1.1267	1.3785	0.3380	1.6763	1.0000	11.3812	2.2003
SWEDEN KRONA	7.9187	12.8887	4.5356	5.5491	1.3524	5.7475	4.0254	45.8141	8.9729
ITALY LIRA	17.2888	28.0890	9.8000	12.1122	2.8518	14.7853	9.7854	1.0000	18.3627
FINLAND MARKKA	36.0146	58.2200	20.8225	25.2244	6.1486	30.6846	18.3054	208.3362	40.3389
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	1.5588	2.5390	0.8227	1.0222	0.2682	1.3281	0.7923	9.0177	1.7461
GREEK DRACHMA	2.8813	4.8816	1.6801	2.0188	0.4920	2.4549	1.4645	16.6678	3.2273
CYPRUS POUND	1.8420	3.1523	1.1110	1.3893	0.3313	1.6529	0.8881	11.2226	2.1700
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	12.2849	19.8617	7.0355	8.6077	2.0877	10.4668	6.2442	71.0890	13.7929
CANADA DOLLAR	1.4670	2.4325	0.8573	1.0498	0.2556	1.2755	0.7809	8.6599	1.6760
EURO	0.8928	1.4507	0.5113	0.6285	0.1524	0.7807	0.4538	5.1648	1.0000

NOTE: NEITHER ACCESS NOR THE PUBLISHER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY ERRORS OR MISTAKES.

DEPOSIT INTEREST RATES CBIA

CURRENCY TERM 1M 3M 6M 1YEAR

US DOLLAR 4.5000 4.5000 4.5000 4.5000

BRITISH STERLING 5.7500 5.7500 5.7500 5.7500

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Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Saudis top list of Arab Gulf visitors during first eleven months of 1998

**** VISITORS COMING** from Arab Gulf states represented 61.97 per cent of the total number of tourists who visited the Kingdom during the first eleven months of 1998, statistics from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities showed. The number of visitors also rose by 29.5 per cent from 569,092 persons during the first eleven months of 1997 to 736,955 persons during the same period of 1998.

Saudis topped the list as they accounted for 78.3 per cent of all Arab Gulf visitors or 577,086 persons. Kuwait ranked second as the number of visitors totalled 79,863 persons or 10.8 per cent.

Visitors coming from Israel during the period covered represented 9.5 per cent of the total number of visitors which the ministry put at 1,189,216 persons. However, the number of Israelis was less in 1998 as the total registered last year was 112,785 persons compared to 115,002 persons in 1997.

The number of tourists coming in groups totalled 219,768 persons, a 12.6 per cent drop from the 249,916 total posted in 1997. The statistics said that the average stay of tourists within groups was 4.15 nights in 1998 compared to 3.9 nights in 1997 (Al Ra'i).

Investments in hotels increase

**** THE SIZE** of investments in hotels which were started in 1998, was estimated at around JD390 million, an official source at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has said. He added that the number of hotel projects from 5 stars to one-star was 72 in addition to hotel suites of 6,134 rooms capacity.

The source indicated that the total number of classified tourist hotels throughout the Kingdom and of all types has reached 211 hotels with a capacity of 11,513 rooms at the end of last year. Furnished apartments and suites, he added, totalled 33 with a capacity of 856 rooms. "The cost of these installations has reached around JD500 million," the source noted. He noted that there was a total of 170 "public hotels" which have a capacity

of 2,200 rooms.

According to the source, investment opportunities in the tourism field witnessed a record expansion during 1998. He indicated the number of hotels increased from 129 hotels in 1994 to 211 hotels in 1998. Consequently, the hotel rooms increased from 7,250 to 11,513 rooms during the period.

He highlighted the role of the tourism sector as it contributes to 11 per cent of the gross domestic product. "The tourism sector constitutes more than 35 per cent of Jordanian exports and provides more than 28,000 jobs," the source concluded (Al Dustour).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Looks like you're building a ladder to climb to the top, but the most important thing about today happens later, when you get in touch with the reason you're going to all this trouble. Love is what's really important, and if there's not quite enough of it in your life, maybe it's because you've been climbing too fast.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Things appear to be going very well again today, and then a breakdown in communication occurs. You don't have to be nervously waiting for it. All you have to do is watch out for it. Pay attention to what's going on. The overall results for the day are likely to be positive, especially if you keep your eyes open.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Someone is trying to teach you something today — not by words alone, but primarily by example. A person you admire a great deal may take on something extremely difficult. If you see something like that happening, pay attention. You can mimic what the other person does, even if you can't quite explain it.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) Today it looks like the hassles are over relatively early, leaving clear sailing for you and the one you love. Plan something special for this evening. Taking off for Tahiti may be what you have in mind, but dinner at a Tahitian restaurant might be the best you can do.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Today, take a moment or two to reflect on what you have and what you're going to leave to future generations. If you start saving money now, by the time you're old enough to retire, you'll be fabulously wealthy. If you aren't already doing this, today is a marvellous day to begin.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Looks like things will go well today, but not quite the way you expected. Your conversation with a partner has got its ups and downs, but don't worry. The disagreements won't last long. Go ahead and hash out all the details, confident that by the time you go to sleep, everything will be hunky-dory.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You could be mistake-prone today, so watch out. You haven't quite mastered something you thought you'd learned by now, and everything you don't know will probably be pointed out to you. Don't be too hard on yourself. Just put in the correction and keep going. Actually, you're doing fine. This is all part of the learning process.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) There's some sort of problem concerning money again, and it looks like it also involves love. Perhaps you and your sweetheart want to do something you really can't afford yet. Well, if the love is strong, you'll find a way. Don't worry about that. Celebrate the love and you'll find a way to make enough money.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) No matter what's going on today, don't worry. There's a happy ending, and a couple of adventures in between here and there won't hurt a bit. One of those might be a misunderstanding with a person you like a lot. Don't just assume you know what was meant by his or her words, especially if they hurt your feelings. Ask.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You could become quite wealthy, but right now it looks like someone else is getting most of your money. Is that because you're putting it in a safe place, investing for your own future? Either that, or you're paying off bills, another noble gesture. You need to put a structure, and stashing something away for the future might be part of it.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Looks like you have no problem getting the money to come in today. The problem is figuring out how to disperse it. You should be thinking about all your options, but be slow to act. If you can wait until this weekend, you'll probably save quite a bit. By then, you'll have seen what's important and what's not.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) What the other person said and what you heard were two different things, so be careful if you're thinking about spreading gossip. You could send things off in a whole different direction than was originally intended. You're getting stronger and more confident all the time, but you need to be responsible, too.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

Arab Gulf markets face tough lessons in '99

DUBAI (R) — Equity markets across the Arab Gulf region, most of which are still in their infancy, face growing pains in 1999 as they suffer from slumping oil prices and economic belt-tightening.

All the Arab Gulf states are dependent on oil revenues to a greater or lesser degree, and when oil prices crashed to 12-year lows in 1998 it took a heavy toll on most of their economies and their stock markets.

Saudi Arabia — the region's biggest economy and the world's largest oil producer and exporter — suffered as much as any.

"The Saudi oil-dependency problem was very amplified in 1998... it became very clear that the Saudi economy would be on a roller-coaster ride as long as it was dependent on a single commodity," said Beshir Bakheet of Bakheet Financial Advisors (BFA) in a report.

"All eyes are watching the government's efforts on the diversification and privatisation fronts, which should be

the main theme for 1999 and its success would be mirrored by the stock market," Bakheet added.

Last year the Saudi index fell nearly 28 per cent lower, the market's third worst year since its launch 15 years ago. Saudi Arabia has no official trading floor but computerised trading is carried out through banks.

Omani shares — which soared 141 per cent in 1997 — slumped more than 50 per cent in 1998 on the country's official bourse.

The Bahrain Stock Exchange (BSE) ended the year 5.3 per cent down, following gains of 49.4 per cent in 1997. The Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) — the Arab World's second largest market in terms of capitalisation after Saudi Arabia — shed 40 per cent.

Only Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) bucked the falling trend, but analysts said gains of some 35 per cent on the Qatari market were largely due to the fact it was

only established in mid-1997 and most shares were not trading at fair value before that.

The UAE market was also said to have ended higher, but it has no formalised trading or central pricing system as yet and shares are currently traded by a handful of brokers licensed by the central bank.

Andrew Cunningham, senior credit officer at Moody's in Cyprus, said there had undoubtedly been enormous progress in Gulf equity markets over the last 10 years, as shown by the number of new local brokerage houses and equity research houses that had sprung up in the region.

"However, the problem remains that despite that progress these are thin markets often driven by speculation rather than economic fundamentals," he said.

"Over the next year, liquidity in the region will remain tight, mainly due to low oil prices, and that will make it very difficult for stock markets to recover," Cunningham

said. A senior bank executive at a Riyadh-based bank said that much of the equity markets' performance would depend on the severity of the winter and how oil price panned out during the course of the year.

"I think currently investors will need a few more encouraging bits of news before they venture back into (these markets) in any major way," he said.

Economic diversification and spreading the source of their revenues is not a new issue for the Arab Gulf states, but the recent collapse in oil prices and a subdued economic outlook in the short-term has made them even more pressing concerns.

Ironically, analysts say, this bleaker economic outlook may also be positive for regional stock markets because it would force governments into pressing ahead with privatisation schemes.

"With two consecutive years of declining oil revenues it's going to be very uncomfortable

able for those governments and economies," Andrew Gilmour, director Middle East and Africa at the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit, told Reuters.

"They (the governments) are going to have to make economic adjustments, but some of those adjustments could actually benefit the stock markets," he said.

Analysts said the Arab Gulf markets had also felt the knock-on effect of the sharp fall from grace of the so-called "Asian tigers" over the last two years, which led many global investors to tar all emerging markets with the same brush.

They also said political concerns would continue to play an important role in determining sentiment on regional equity markets. And further tensions with Iraq would weigh on shares across the Gulf.

"Politics and oil prices are what it's really all about," one analyst said.

A.F.M. TRADE Tuesday, 16-02-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	215.000	215.500	+0.23%
NTL BK	1.610	1.570	-2.48%
BK OF JO	1.400	1.360	-2.86%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.550	1.530	-1.29%
THE HOUSING BK	3.300	3.260	-1.21%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.700	1.700	0.00%
JO. GULF BK	0.700	0.700	0.00%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.700	1.780	+4.71%
JO. INVEST. & FIN. BK	1.350	1.360	+0.74%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.550	0.550	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 285.070 point = -0.14%

INSURANCE

JO. GULF INS 1.860 1.770 -4.84%

INSURANCE INDEX 125.170 point = -0.48%

SERVICES

ELECTRIC POWER	1.800	1.770	-1.67%
IRBID ELECTRICITY	1.700	1.700	0.00%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.840	0.810	-3.57%
REAL ESTATE	1.080	1.080	+1.88%
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.270	0.260	-3.70%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	7.110	7.300	+2.67%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS. & E	0.850	0.850	-1.12%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	2.000	2.000	0.00%
GRAND INDEX	1.190	1.180	-0.84%

GRAND INDEX 115.700 point = -0.10%

INDUSTRY

CEMENT	3.710	3.680	-0.81%
PHOSPHATE	2.480	2.380	-4.03%
ARAB POTASH	4.140	4.170	+0.72%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.880	10.880	0.00%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRICULT	1.080	1.090	+0.93%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.230	3.200	-0.93%
CELANESE	1.350	1.370	+1.48%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.450	1.510	+4.14%
NTL STEEL	0.540	0.530	-1.85%
DAR AL DAWA	5.800	5.680	-2.07%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.580	0.570	-1.72%
JO. STEEL	0.960	0.950	-1.04%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.910	1.900	-0.52%
CHLORINE	1.230	1.230	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.410	0.420	+2.44%
NTL LIME	0.360	0.360	0.00%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.310	0.310	0.00%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	1.080	1.060	-0.00%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.010	1.000	-0.99%
SULPHUR - CHEMICALS	0.430	0.450	+4.65%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM	1.360	1.340	-1.47%
EL-ZAY	1.360	1.310	-3.68%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.680	0.670	-1.47%
IND. RESOURCES	0.450	0.440	-2.22%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.610	-1.61%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.750	0.750	0.00%

INDUSTRY INDEX 87.020 point = -0.48%

PARALLEL

EXPORT BK (75	0.940	0.920	-2.13%
UNION INVS. CORP	0.500	0.500	0.00%
AL - EKAL	0.870	0.890	+2.30%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.530	0.530	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.430	0.450	+4.65%
AL DAWLAH	0.620	0.620	0.00%
ARAB INVESTORS	0.950	1.000	+5.26%
SPECIALIZED INVS	0.730	0.690	-5.48%
OPTICAL & AUDIO	0.420	0.420	0.00%

CBJ total assets stand at JD3.4b

AMMAN (Petra) — Total assets at the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) stood at JD3,383.3 million at the end of December 1998, according to CBJ sources.

The sources said CBJ gold was worth JD144.8 million, and the total amounts of cash and deposits at hand amounted to JD1,176.5 million. Bonds in foreign currency amounted to JD63.6 million, the source said.

According to the CBJ budget, which was published in the Official Gazette, the total assets of the agreements of exchange amounted to

JD193.7 million, while other assets in non-foreign currency totalled JD718 million. The CBJ's contributions in international and regional financial institutions totalled JD 31.8 million, according to the CBJ budget.

The bank's total assets in local currency amounted to JD 1,053.7 million, including bonds, securities and government notes worth JD424 million, and discounted bonds worth JD 608.6 million.

As for liabilities, the currency issued totalled JD 1,005.3 million at the end of December and the total of cur-

rent accounts and deposits in Jordanian dinars amounted to JD1,584.5 million, including JD12.5 million with public institutions and JD599 million with licensed banks, in addition to JD971 million in the form of certificates of deposit. Current accounts and deposits in convertible currency amounted to JD 647.8 million, including JD389 million with licensed banks.

The budget report said that there are commitments against the Special Drawing Rights, amounting to JD 6.5 million, in addition to other liabilities amounting to JD55.5 million.

Freight rates to increase by \$800 between Asia and Europe

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Freight rates between Asia and Europe are set to rise by as much as \$800 per TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units) by October this year, the Business Times has said.

Average freight rates between the two continents in the third quarter of 1998 stood at \$1,400 per TEU, according to figures from Clarkson Research Studies, the report said.

If two more proposed rate increases scheduled for July and October are agreed upon,

the TEU rate increase will be a nearly 60 per cent jump from the average freight rates last year, the report noted.

An industry source told the paper that the Asia Westbound Rate Agreement, a unit of the Far Eastern Freight Conference, was proposing a rate increase of \$300 per TEU on July 1, and another \$150 increase by October 1.

The conference has already implemented a \$200 per TEU increase between Asia and Europe on Jan. 1, and another increase per TEU of \$150 is

expected by April 1, the report said.

The source said he expected the later increases would be implemented since this would occur during the peak season for shipping.

Members of the Far Eastern Freight Conference, which include huge lines such as Maersk Line, Mitsui-OSK Lines, P and O Nedlloyd and Nippon Yusen Kaisha, control about 65 to 70 per cent of the liner capacity in trade between Europe and Asia, the report said.

Canon posts record profit in 1998

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan's Canon Inc. has said the parent company's pre-tax profit rose 2.2 per cent to 150.1 billion yen (\$1.3 billion) in calendar 1998, the fourth consecutive record result.

Sales climbed 2.1 per cent to 1,566.8 billion yen, said

the top maker of copying machines, printers and other precision equipment.

Net profit fell 4.9 per cent to \$1.9 billion yen due to higher taxes.

"Sales were slack in Japan and the Asian region but stayed firm generally in the

United States and Europe," the company said in a statement.

For 1999, Canon forecast pre-tax profit would fall to 100 billion yen and net profit to 57 billion yen. It estimated sales at 1,580 billion yen.



AUSTRIAN AIRLINES

AUSTRIAN AIRLINES IN JORDAN

extends to His Majesty

King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein,

The Hashemite Family

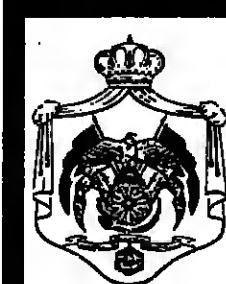
and the Jordanian people

their deepest sympathy and

condolences on the passing of

His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal

May God rest his soul in peace



The Consul General of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Dominican Republic

BISHARA ISSA MILADEH

mourn with deep grief, the loss of

His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal

(May God bless his soul)

and wish to extend to

His Majesty King Abdullah

and the Royal Hashemite Family heartfelt

condolences and sympathy

French solo sailor rescued unharmed in South Pacific

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — French sailor Isabelle Autissier was rescued unharmed Tuesday, 24 hours after capsizing in heavy seas in the South Pacific during the around alone race, the Chilean navy said.

Cmdr. Nilton Duran said Autissier was rescued at 11:37 a.m. (1437 GMT) by fellow competitor Giovanni Soldini of Italy.

The French sailor is now safe and in good condition aboard the Italian yacht Fila. Duran told the Associated Press by telephone.

He said the Fila was continuing in the regatta and was expected to reach Punta Del Este, Uruguay, the end of the third leg, in 7-9 days.

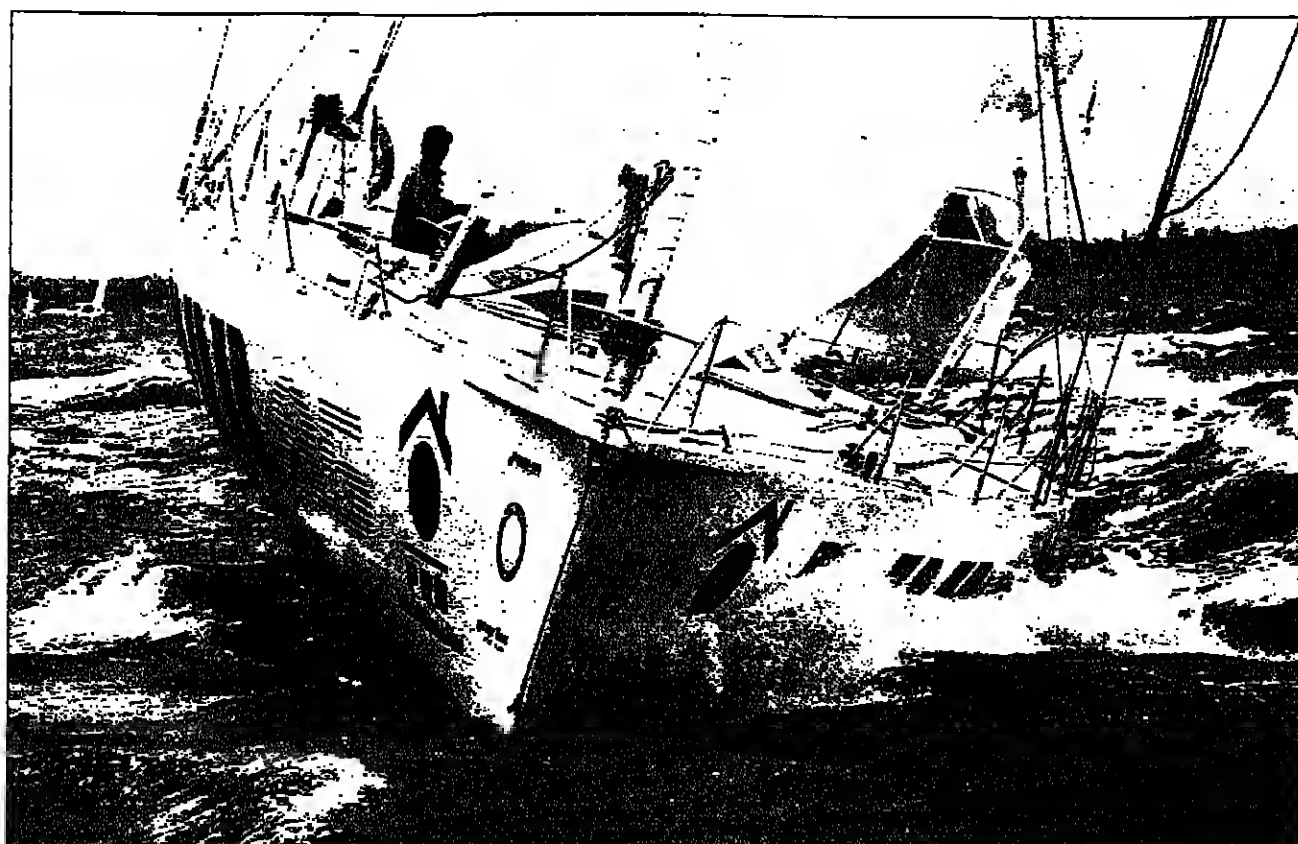
Autissier was the overall leader of the regatta when her French 18-metre (60-foot) boat Prb capsized Monday about halfway between Auckland, New Zealand, and South America.

The yacht "was overturned and was completely lost by the bad weather front," Duran said.

He said Autissier was rescued 3,333 kilometres west of Punta Arenas, Chile's southernmost city 3,000 kilometres from Santiago.

"Isabelle is aboard, everything is fine," Autissier's team headquarters in Paris said in a dispatch quoting Soldini.

Autissier sent a mayday and made a brief call to her



Navigator Isabelle Autissier of France had capsized and taken to a life raft in the southern Pacific ocean, race organiser Dan McConnell said on Tuesday. Isabelle Autissier of France, the leader of the 'Around the World Alone' yacht race is seen as she departs Auckland's Waitemata harbour at the start of the third leg of the race heading to Uruguay's Punta Del Este in this February 6 file photo. The 'Around the World Alone' race is the longest race on earth for an individual in any sport. The singlehanded sailing race cover 27,000 miles of the world's roughest and most remote oceans (Reuters photo)

Paris headquarters after apparently being capsized by 35-knot winds and waves as high as 12 metres, said Peter Rachtman, an Auckland-based race director.

An earlier report on the around alone race's official Internet page said Autissier's team headquarters had received a radio

call over crackling inter-

ference shortly before the emergency beacon was set off.

Soldini was approximately 320 kilometres north-east of Autissier's position when he received word of his 42-year-old competitor's plight at 1423 GMT by race organisers and turned toward her.

He also was facing heavy seas and 12 metres and

race organisers estimated he was at least 10 hours from Autissier.

Duran said weather had improved by the time Soldini reached Autissier, which winds having slowed to 25-27 knots.

The officer said the Chilean navy kept contact with stations in Honolulu and Alameda in the United States and Auckland, New

Zealand, during the search and rescue efforts.

Despite holding the overall lead when the fleet departed Auckland, Autissier was in second place in the third leg early Monday before her boat capsized. At 0940 GMT yesterday morning, Autissier was trailing leg leader Marc Thiercelin by 63 kilometres.

Rodman remains a man without a team

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While Dennis Rodman and the Los Angeles Lakers seem to want each other, they aren't together yet.

When — or if — it does take place appears to be up to the eccentric seven-time rebounding champion.

"I heard he's coming," Shaquille O'Neal, the NBA's leading scorer, said Monday after another practice came and went without an appearance from Rodman. O'Neal said he hasn't spoken with the Worm since last week.

"To be honest, I haven't heard much about it," reserve forward Corie Blount said. "I haven't heard the players talk about it, the coaches."

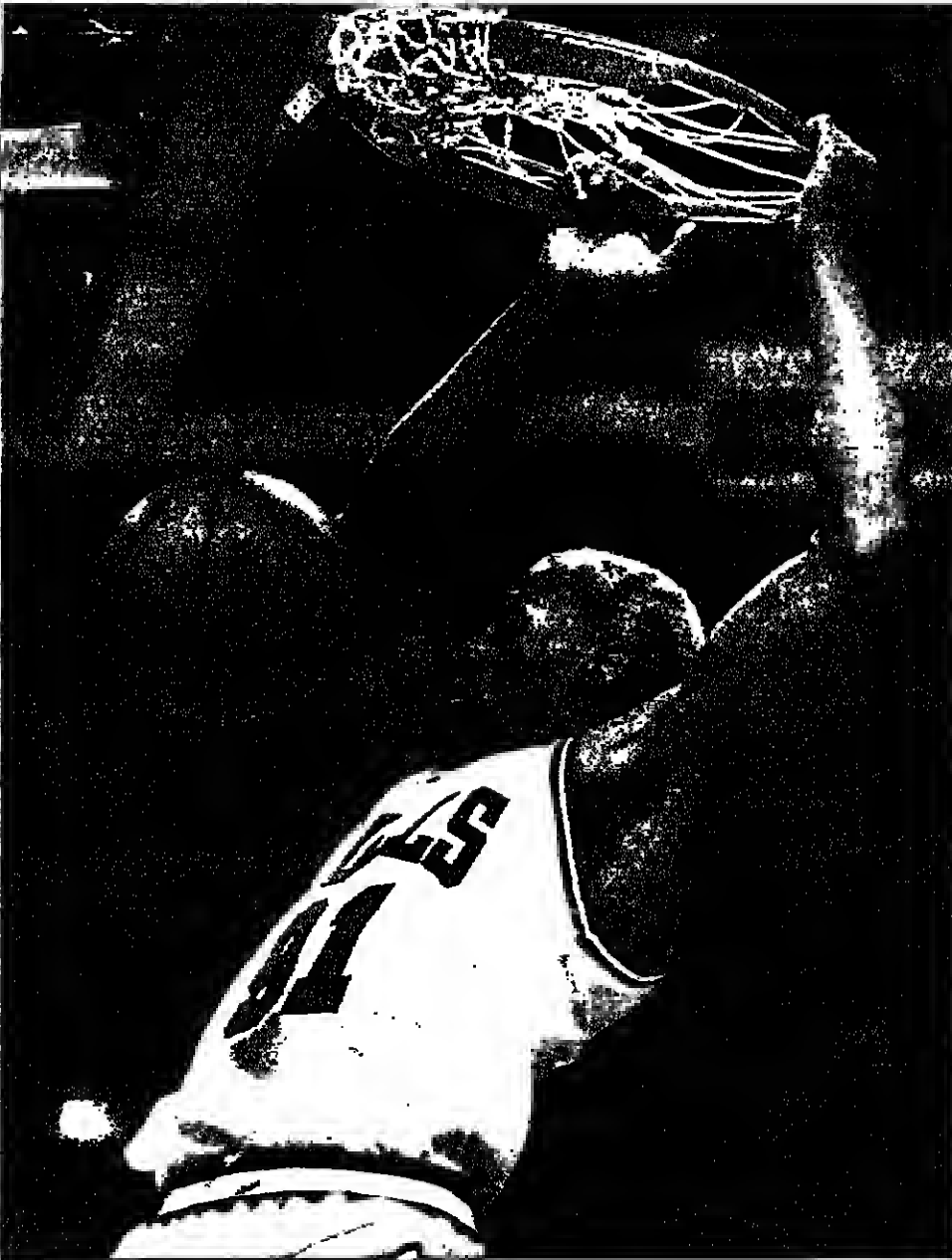
A source close to the Lakers told the Associated Press late Sunday that Rodman was expected to sign with the team by today and be in uniform for tonight's game against Charlotte.

Lakers spokesman John Black said there was "absolutely nothing new to report," but acknowledged that executives Jerry West and Mitch Kupchak have been talking with Rodman's agents.

A couple hours earlier, Black answered his home telephone by saying, "Dennis Rodman Hotline."

Several players said speculation over Rodman's expected arrival hasn't been a distraction, but the Lakers enter tonight's game with a disappointing 3-3 record.

"I think I'll just leave that



Dennis Rodman (File photo)

up to everybody else to talk about," Lakers coach Del Harris said when asked about Rodman.

"In my contract, it says to play basketball," reserve forward Travis Knight said. "I just show up at practice and at games and play as hard as I can. I don't really give it much mind. I've got enough to worry about doing my job."

Derek Harper, at 37 the oldest player on the team and the same age as Rodman, said over the weekend that "any distraction was going to be a cancer for this team."

"I think he can help us as a player here," Harper said Monday. "If and when it happens, it happens. That's the only approach you can have. We haven't, I haven't, talked about it with anybody except the media."

The Lakers first expressed an interest in Rodman two weeks ago. They can only offer the veterans' minimum of \$1 million, for this lock-out-shortened season, and that money is diminishing with every game Rodman misses.

Starting tonight, they'll play six games in eight days. Rodman has played on five of the last 10 NBA championships, including the last three with the Chicago Bulls, who opted not to pursue him last month after Michael Jordan announced his retirement.

Representatives for Rodman's new agents from International Creative Management could not be reached Monday.

IOC official suggests ditching profit sharing deal

LONDON (AP) — Sydney Olympic organisers can ease their financial troubles by reallocating more than Australian dollars 100 million (\$66 million) from a profit-sharing deal back into the games, the IOC's marketing chief said Tuesday.

"You would solve the financing issue in a stroke of a pen," marketing director Michael Payne said.

Raising money from corporate sponsors for the 2000 Sydney games has become a major concern, especially in the wake of the Olympic corruption scandals.

With Sydney about Australian dollars 200 million (\$130 million) short of its target for sponsorship revenues, Payne suggested the controversial profit deal should be reviewed.

"There is no way the games should be compromised because of a profit deal that we were opposed to," he told the Associated Press in a telephone interview from IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. "This money should be put back into the games."

Payne said the IOC warned the Australians three years ago against projecting a surplus for the games. Sydney organisers have predicted a surplus of Australian dollars 30 million (\$ 17.7 million).

"The IOC was saying, 'this is crazy to be talking about a profit now. You should wait until the day after the closing ceremony,'" Payne said. "For various reasons, they wanted to lock down issues on profit two or three years ago. Maybe that should be reopened. There's more than dollars 100 million involved."

Under terms of the IOC's contract with Olympic cities, 90 per cent of any surplus goes to the host country and 10 per cent to the IOC. Of the 90 per cent set aside for the host country, 10 per cent goes to the National Olympic Committee.

The profit-sharing arrangement for Sydney has gone through several changes.

In a deal with the new South Wales government, the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) agreed to give up its veto power over key decisions in exchange for a guaranteed sum of Australian dollars 100 million (\$ 66 million).

Later, the NSW government effectively bought out the AOC's right to the money. The funds go to the AOC whether there is a surplus or not.

"That money has now been taken off the balance books," Payne said. "In hindsight, it might have been premature to talk about profit."

The IOC's share of the profit deal was eventually capped at Australian dollars 13.5 million (\$

8.95 million). The IOC has said it would earmark most of its share to a special fund for sports programmes in Australia and the rest of the Oceania region.

Payne said IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch has made clear the international committee is ready to help out if the organising committee and government request it, including reconsidering the IOC's profit share.

"It would seem the first place to start is to look at the whole profit deal, which we thought was a bad idea in the first place," Payne said. "We would never do a deal of this nature again. Never in a million years."

Even before the corruption scandals involving Olympic bid cities, Sydney was struggling to meet its Australian dollars 2.6 billion (\$ 1.65 billion) budget.

Specifically, organisers have fallen short of their Australian dollars 874 million (\$342 million) sponsorship target.

This has led to fears that budget cutbacks will be made that could affect the games.

In Sydney, Olympics Minister Michael Knight suggested for the first time Tuesday that the Olympics could get by without the extra sponsorship revenue.

"You can run a pretty fantastic Olympic games on dollars 2.4 billion (\$ 1.52 million)," he said.

Payne said Sydney organisers erred by setting their latest sponsorship revenues too high.

"SOCOG has twice met their targets, and got the most successful marketing programme we've ever seen for the games," he said. "If it's a problem, it's because they were too successful early on. They allowed the targets to continue to be raised."

"I think the current target is wrong," he said. "It never should have been raised to this height. It's like a high jumper."

"You can keep raising the height, but eventually he can no longer make it over the bar."

Jacques Rogge, the IOC executive board member who heads the IOC coordination commission for the Sydney games, said he is optimistic that Sydney will raise enough money.

"Yes, there is still some revenue to be found, but it's too soon to be worried," he said in a phone interview from Belgium.

"I'm very relaxed about it."

"We are vigilant. But today no one can say there is a danger, a shortfall, a problem. We'll have a better idea in June after ticket sales have started and new efforts have begun to find new sources of revenue."

Redskins acquire Brad Johnson, lose Green to Rams

WASHINGTON (R) — The Washington Redskins acquired quarterback Brad Johnson from the Minnesota Vikings Monday as Trent Jones left them to sign with the St. Louis Rams.

The Redskins said they had given the Vikings three draft selections — picks in the first and third rounds in 1999 and a second-round pick in 2000 — to acquire Johnson, who lost his starting job to Randall Cunningham in Minnesota while sidelined with a pair of injuries.

Green, who had replaced Gus Frierotte as the starting quarterback for the Redskins, signed a four-year deal with St. Louis. Green now unseats Tony Banks in St. Louis.

"I think Brad Johnson can do a number of positive things for our football team," said Redskins head coach Norv Turner.

"He's a very accurate passer with a career completion percentage of over 60 per cent and an excellent touchdown to interception ratio. He has proven that he can help get a team into the playoffs."

Johnson is entering his eighth NFL season after the Vikings drafted him in the ninth round out of Florida State

in 1992.

He opened last season as Minnesota's starter but broke his right leg in the second week. He replaced the injured Cunningham in the ninth week but fractured his right thumb in the game. He came back in week 15, completing four of seven passes for one touchdown.

Johnson finished the year 65-of-101 for 747 yards and seven touchdowns. Johnson signed a five-year, \$15 million contract toward the end of the 1997 season but the Vikings re-signed Cunningham — who ended a two-year retirement — to a multi-year extension, which left Johnson as an expensive backup.

"In this day and age of salary cap restraints it is virtually impossible to have two starting quarterbacks," Vikings general manager Tim Connolly said. "We were in the fortunate situation to trade one of our quarterbacks for future players."

Terms of Green's contract were not disclosed but the deal is believed to be worth about \$16 million. He rejected a four-year, \$12 million offer from the Redskins.

"I think Trent's heart was in Washington, but when he visit-

ed here and learned what St. Louis was trying to accomplish, he decided the Rams were his team," said Jim Steiner, Green's agent.

The 28-year-old Green, born in St. Louis and an area high school star, was one of the NFL's biggest surprises this season. After attempting just one pass in his first four years Green took the starting job from Frierotte in 1998 and threw for 3,441 yards, 23 touchdowns and 11 interceptions in 15 games.

"I always say you don't get any better if you don't take any risks," Rams coach Dick Vermeil said. "He was one of the true starting quarterbacks available in free agency."

The signing of Green signals the end of Banks' three-year run as the Rams' starter. Banks, who is eligible for restricted free agency, compiled a passer rating of only 68.6 and threw twice as many interceptions (14) as touchdowns (7) before suffering a season-ending knee injury in Week 15.

"In all probability, he will not be back," Vermeil said. "I believe Tony will be a successful starting quarterback. It just doesn't look like it will be here."

Yeboah's contract, despite scoreless streak, extended with Hamburg

HAMBURG, Germany (AP) — Ghana's Anthony Yeboah, despite a rocky start in the Bundesliga, Tuesday signed a one-year contract extension with Hamburger SV.

The talented but erratic former Leeds United forward was the Bundesliga's leading marksman in 1993 and 1994 at Eintracht Frankfurt, before having problems with then-coach Jupp Heynckes.

Last season, the 32-year-old striker signed with Hamburg and promptly went 1,231 minutes of play without connecting for a goal. This season he has regained

some of his scoring prowess.

"Last season was the hardest of my career. I want to thank the coaches and fans that they stood behind me when things weren't going so well," said Yeboah.

Hamburg also announced that Robert Kovac, a Bayer

Leverkusen midfielder, signed a three-year contract with the club starting next season.

Kovac, raised in Germany but with a Croatian passport, has been a key player for second-place Leverkusen this season.

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DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Prepare for Programme planning meetings with counterparts and participate in the deliberations, in addition to the preparation and distribution of minutes.
- Provide administrative support to the project officer in the daily follow-up of activities.
- Assist in the gathering of data and information related to the projects.
- Assist in drafting internal and external memos and letters as necessary and in the preparation of various reports and follow-up and monitoring of contracts.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- University degree in Social Sciences.
- Excellent computer skills.
- Four years working experience.

Interested candidates to apply to:

Operations Officer
UNICEF - JCO
P.O. Box 840162
Amman 11184

Deadline for applications Feb. 25, 1999.

